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MY  
BROTHER JONATHAN

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NOVELS

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WOODSMOKE  
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(with E. Brett Young)

POETRY

FIVE DEGREES SOUTH  
POEMS: 1916-1918

BELLES LETTRES:

MARCHING ON TANGA  
ROBERT BRIDGES

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

MY  
BROTHER  
JONATHAN

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*To*  
*My Friends*  
FLORENCE & TOM LAMONT

*Author's Note.*

The scenes, characters and events portrayed in this book are entirely imaginary, none of them having any existence outside the pages of this and the author's other Midland novels.

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BOOK ONE  
CHADSHILL



# MY BROTHER JONATHAN

## *CHADSHILL*

### CHAPTER I

#### GEOLOGICAL

DURING the last quarter of the nineteenth century and of Queen Victoria's reign, the social geology of that corner of the Black Country which straddles the county boundary of Worcester and Stafford began to show, under the volcanic stresses of industrialism, a confusion of faults, eruptions, distortions and subsidences as various as that of the rocky strata on which the land's physical shapes were moulded. Here and there, in shabby-genteel manor-houses and moated farms, isolated patches of the primary Mercian formation persisted, pitiful but unchanged, under the Saxon names of Abberley and Ombersley and Weir, whose owners had clung to their dwindling acres ever since King Offa gave his name to the great Dyke west of Severn, to the domed eminence of Uffdown, and to the wood beneath it. Later and less durable influences—such as that of the Marcher Lords, those Pomfrets and Powyses

whose domination had made all Mercia Norman—had melted away like the Arenig glaciers, leaving no more than a stony castle-tump or an occasional archway cut with dog's-tooth carving to bear witness to their splendid impermanence, like those glacial boulders with which the Clents are strewn. There remained, it is true, in old market towns such as Halesby and Stourton, once gracious, now debauched by staring brick, a sort of breccia or conglomerate in which fragments of all the earlier formations might be found; but these broken strata had no continuity, so warped, so shattered, so overwhelmed were they by the eruption of underlying carboniferous rocks which the exploitation of the coal-measures had brought to the surface, changing the contours of the earth by mountainous elevations of pit-mounds and deposits of soot and cinders; modifying the social aspect of the countryside by thrusting into prominence such portents as the new industrial aristocracy—families like the Willis of Mawne, a black sport from the Saxon Hacketts, or the Hingstons of Stourford, who came from God knows where.

Among all the elements which composed what geologists might call the late Victorian "horizon," there remained one family for which there was no accounting: the Dakers of Brimsley—Eugene Dakers, his wife, and their two sons.

By no stretch of imagination could one conceive the presence of a Willis, or even an older Hingston, in an Ombersley or Abberley drawing-room; and though

Lady Hingston drew the line (in her favourite phrase) at Mr. Ingleby, the Halesby chemist, who was almost a gentleman, whose son not only shared in the lavish entertainments of the Willises at Mawne but danced there with female collaterals of the Pomfrets and Powyses and was even graciously "bowed to" from the Ombersley and Abberley wagonettes, the Dakers went everywhere. Belonging to none of our accredited formations, archaic, kainozoic or merely accidental, they penetrated all.

Nobody—except, of course, Mr. Dakers himself—knew exactly where they had come from. Nobody knew, precisely, where Mr. Dakers went. They lived in a converted cottage on the Northern slope of Uffdown Hill—which Mr. Willis called "our little Switzerland" and Mr. Dakers "our little Parnassus"—in a small, gabled house with a minute, secluded lawn surrounded by a damson orchard—nobody made better damson jam than Mrs. Dakers—commanding a foreground of Uffdown Wood, the last haunt of nightingales, and a rolling country that fell towards the upper Stour valley and the battlements of Mawne, last outpost of the trenched and mined and blasted no-man's-land of the Black Country.

Every morning, at ten minutes to eight precisely, Mr. Dakers would issue from the orchard gate at Chadshill (as their house was called) in a Harris knickerbocker suit, which was rare in those days. Thence, with a little dispatch-case in one hand and a cane

in the other, he would walk briskly down the hill to Brimsley station, from which a Midland train, fastidiously avoiding the direct route that pierces the Black Country, would carry him in a roundabout and leisurely fashion through the more rural suburbs of North Bromwich to the heart of the City. Mr. Dakers was the only first-class season-ticket holder at Brimsley. From the moment when he reached North Bromwich until his return to Brimsley his movements were obscure. Whatever his business may have been it was, like everything else about him, evidently and respectably amateurish; for he invariably returned by a train that reached Brimsley at four-thirty on weekdays and one o'clock on Saturday, and trudged up to Chadshill with an air that resembled that of a country gentleman in everything but the dispatch-case—a tall, wiry figure; hatless, and slightly bald, with a bronzed scalp; his hair a little too long, his grey moustache clipped a little too short for convention; his Malacca cane swinging, his rich voice booming out poetry with an accent that was refined past the degree of nullity.

For Mr. Dakers, as everybody knew, was a poet; and in this, perhaps, lay the secret of the family's social ubiquity. People in Halesby, at that time, had given up manufacturing poetry since the days of Shenstone, on whose exiguous works Mr. Dakers was an authority. Nor did they read it. Their main concerns were (according to their station in life) a traffic in hard and precious metals, a petty trade, a learned profession, or the pre-

servation of an indigenous gentility. Indeed, though they were proud, in the presence of strangers, of having produced Shenstone unaided, they never read his works, much less recited them, and would have blushed to have written them. Still, there he was; and there was Mr. Dakers carrying on the literary tradition; and if a man were bold enough to confess himself a poet, as Mr. Dakers constantly did by inference, he must obviously be something out of the ordinary; and we in the Black Country were so consciously proud, and unconsciously ashamed, of our sordidness and the material nature of our interests, that we could afford—figuratively of course—to support one poet at least. Particularly when our poet, as luck would have it, was also a sportsman.

His sportsmanship was Mr. Dakers' compensatory grace. That knickerbocker suit was no mere symbol of his revolt against the urban nature of his employment; it hid the hardened sinews of an athlete. It was not for nothing that the clipped military moustache corrected the impression which his intellectual forehead and wavy grey hair (grown a little too long) might have created. The crossed foils and the polo-sticks in the lobby at Chadshill were not without significance. In sport, as in everything else, Mr. Dakers declared, there is such a thing as Aristocracy. Now the miners of Halesby and the factory-hands of the Black Country have always been sportsmen of a kind—so much so that Sir Joseph Astill, the brewer, who had evidently been studying



auctioneers' advertisements, once described the city of North Bromwich as a "first-class sporting neighbourhood." The working-men flock in their tens of thousands on Saturdays to see North Bromwich Albion play football. On Sundays they race whippets along the county boundary, under Mr. Willis's gates at Mawne. Among the Dulston slag-heaps there are cockpits where old English game-fowl can still fight a bloody main. When beer was cheap enough to make the pursuit enticing, dozens of miners would sit for hours on the canal bank, with a float, a bag of ground-bait, and a gallon jar, fishing for roach. But these pursuits were not sport in Mr. Dakers' estimation. What he demanded was a democratic, communal, concerted village sport: in other words a return to the conditions of Merrie England.

As the only gentleman in Brimsley he made it his business, when he first settled at Chadshill, to bring back the good old times. It was he who sought to revive the glories of Crécy and Agincourt (*this earth, this land, this England!*) by setting up tricoloured archery targets in the paddock at the back of the Hare and Hounds. It was he who raised the first Maypole on Brimsley Green, and organized October nutting-parties in Uffdown Wood. The Church looked askance at his nutting-parties. Mr. Pomfret of Wychbury, to whose parish Brimsley belonged, was all for Merrie England himself; but Mr. Dakers' nutting-parties and May-night revels were a thought too Elizabethan even

for him. It was Mr. Dakers, again, who founded a glee-club (Old English: *Gliw-gleo*), at which a mixed choir of eleven voices sang *O, who will o'er the downs so free?* to his conducting and Mrs. Dakers' accompaniment on the schoolroom piano. According to Mr. Dakers the first modern abuse to be overthrown was our unnatural segregation of the sexes; he longed to "throw the young people together"; the blushing milkmaid of pastoral poetry, who stood with her pails at every stile waiting for kisses, had an important part in his programme. If there had been any water in Brimsley bigger than a duck-pond, he would certainly have organized mixed bathing. Everything in his England was merrie, mixed, and gleeful. But Victoria, alas, was not Elizabeth; and, England declining to be half as merrie as he wished it, Mr. Dakers fell back upon the Brimsley Village Cricket Club.

This, thanks to his enthusiasm, was something of a success. On a pitch that resembled a miniature contoured model of Switzerland, he instructed the youth of Brimsley in the science of keeping a good length and a straight bat. He hurled cricket-balls in their faces and called them butter-fingers if they dropped them. Daily he urged on them the necessity of training: a cold tub every morning, and a run before breakfast. Unfortunately there were no baths in Brimsley in those days, and most of his pupils went trudging over the fields to their farmwork long before Mr. Dakers was awake; but he himself might be seen every morning, in sandshoes

and sweater and running-shorts, trotting along the road that skirts the base of Uffdown with a smile of conscious virtue written on his face. And the cricket club, as I have said, was a success. In Jubilee Year Brimsley beat the staff and (mild) patients of Crofton Asylum by three wickets, and drew, because it rained that day, with Wychbury Second Eleven on their own ground. The great victory over Crofton was celebrated by a jam-tea, to which the team was entertained on the lawn at Chadshill. After tea, as usual, Mrs. Dakers recited the Mad Scene from *Hamlet*.

On every possible occasion Mrs. Dakers would recite. It was, in fact, the only way in which she could get level with her versatile husband; and Mr. Dakers, who was, at least in theory, a feminist, encouraged her to do so. As a tribute to his wife's talent he would sit with bowed head, two brown hands clasped over his eyes, listening intently, as if he were in church. For Mrs. Dakers, in the days before Mr. Dakers induced her to submerge her talent in his, had been an actress—no common mummer, be it understood, but a great exponent of Shakespeare. And though, in private, Mr. Dakers frequently forgot this and was very rude to her, in public he never allowed anybody else to forget it. But for the passion that had forced her to forsake her art and attain immortality, of another kind, in his own poetry, the name of Lavinia Lord, he suggested, would have been remembered beside that of Mary Anderson. A wonderful actress, he said: and he had said it so many

times that all of us, who had never heard of Lavinia Lord before, believed implicitly in Mrs. Dakers' genius—all of us that is, except Lady Hingston, who had an acid word for everybody and said that she was prepared to believe that Mrs. Dakers was capable of acting any part but that of a lady. But then, the Hingstons made a business of everything, even of gentility; while the essence of the Dakers code, in sport, in literature, in everything, was amateurism.

And Mrs. Dakers, in any case, closely resembled a Shakespearean heroine in her everyday life. Even if she were merely engaged in pouring out tea or handing round damson-jam sandwiches to the local cricket-club, she spoke, she moved her body and hands and eyes, like Portia or Rosalind or Ophelia or Desdemona or Viola, according to the exigencies of mood or environment. To carry the resemblance further, she even dressed like one—or any one of them except Rosalind in the first two acts. By day she wore the flowing draperies of silk in Liberty shades which local patriotism associated in those days with Madox Jones's cartoons. At night the silk was replaced by folds of rich and sombre velvet: the black of a night sky, splendours of imperial murex. A perfect Rossetti, Mr. Dakers confidentially declared; and ever afterwards you could see Mrs. Dakers leaning out from the gold bar of heaven. *Her hair that lay along her back was yellow like ripe corn*—and the hint of a goitre—that “columned whiteness,” which Mr. Dakers celebrated in more than one

of his lyrics, though the order of the column was Egyptian rather than Doric, confirmed the Preraphaelite type.

As a matter of fact, there is no doubt that she must have been, in youth, a pretty woman; a graceful though rather big-boned blonde, with eyes a little too prominently blue and hair a little too golden to be genuine. At the time when she first—and almost literally—swam into our ken, the star had lost a little of its brilliance; the voluminous, flowing robes gave an uncomfortable air of diffuseness to a form that was undeniably skinny; the fixed and languid smile had a bony, a skeletal quality; and the goitre, made more apparent by the desiccation of the surrounding tissues, was habitually veiled by wisps of tulle or chiffon, the effect of which was untidy rather than ethereal.

It is difficult to say if Mr. Dakers was aware of this decadence. Certainly, in public, he gave no sign of being so. In the presence of visitors he always treated her with the "distant reverence" of his favourite song, with veiled allusions to her dramatic triumphs, with the solicitude of an impresario arranging shaded lights and the right setting for an interview with the Press, or of an amateur displaying the best picture (a typical Rossetti) in his collection. And Mrs. Dakers, out of sheer habit, or because, whatever she may have been originally, he had made an actress of her, played up to him, posing with her still, rapt smile and drooping fingertips, or moving, with little stately hesitations, like

a tragedy queen, until you realized that she *was* no common clay. Her voice, again . . . Mr. Dakers had seen to that as well. Small-talk, on those smiling lips, would have sounded sacrilegious; and so, for the most part, in public, she was silent. Whenever she did speak—to ask you if you wished for cream or sugar or both—she always gave the impression of talking in blank verse; and when Mr. Dakers heard her, he would drop his own voice, as if he were anxious that you should not miss hearing a gem of elocution to which faint echoes of a cockney accent added, in our Midland ears, a trace of the exotic. From first to last he used her, in public, with what he himself would have described as an old-world courtesy; as a work of art—which she was, increasingly; as something ethereal and fairylike—which she certainly was not; as a creature isolated and removed from all vulgar knowledge and experience; a poetical abstraction absolved from the needs and emotions of dusty humanity. In private, however, Mrs. Dakers must have been permitted to relax; for the household was pressed for money, and generally in debt; and off-stage, so to speak, their ethereal union had been blessed by the birth of two children, both of them boys.

## CHAPTER II

### SCANDAL AT MAWNE

THE early history of the two Dakers boys is rather mysterious. Theoretically Mr. Dakers prided himself on the isolation of Chadshill, aloof, removed from the miry, material ways of what passed for society in the Halesby district. He did not wish his children to be corrupted by our urban ways or to mingle with the very mixed collection of the Halesby grammar-school. Of course he was polite to us, and always ready to be helpful in a dignified way; but the altitude of Chadshill as compared with Halesby was symbolical. Probably the lowness of his bank-balance had also something to do with it.

At any rate, for reasons of choice or necessity, the Dakers boys were educated at home. Mr. Dakers himself taught them English, boxing, Latin, mathematics, cricket and botany; while Mrs. Dakers instructed them in music, elocution and the ornamental graces. How she ever found time for those nobody could imagine; for Mr. Dakers included among his other refinements the taste of a gourmet. Dinner was in the nature of a ceremony. He always dressed for it, bringing home marine delicacies such as crabs and oysters and Dover soles from North Bromwich in his leather dispatch-

case. It was only in his presence that Mrs. Dakers was able to be ornamental. In his absence she performed not only the housework but the cooking; for though the family could afford delicacies it could not run to a servant. Domestic service, as Mr. Dakers affirmed, was inherently humiliating to both sides; every dignified human being should fend for himself; and he would put his theory into practice by cheerfully and skilfully making an omelette or mixing a salad-dressing, with a dash of tarragon, for the excellent French lettuces that Mrs. Dakers raised in a cold frame. Sometimes he would assert the dignity of labour by rolling up his shirt-sleeves and chopping wood in full view of the road, setting an example to the passing farm-labourers, showing them that even though he was a gentleman, he had no pride and was, in fact, democratic. It was also an object-lesson, he told his wife, for the boys. And he liked to see a wood-fire blazing in the study at night.

But it was Mrs. Dakers, in her Liberty gown, who cracked the coal for the kitchen and cleared out the cinders and blacked the grate, and, in the intervals between music, deportment and elocution, darned socks, starched shirt-fronts, and laid out her husband's brown velvet dinner-jacket on the bed at night. She must, in fact, have been a better actress than Lady Hingston admitted, for always, through this life of incredible hardship and self-denial, she preserved intact her sweet and languid smile, her queenly gait, her placid—perhaps her rather stupid—remoteness.



After dinner—Mr. Dakers himself indulged in a glass of wine from which he would sometimes prevail on Mrs. Dakers to take one sip—when his wife had vanished into the kitchen to wash the dishes, Mr. Dakers would retire to his study, light a cigar, and entertain the boys with readings of the best English poetry, including extracts from his own unpublished works. An early familiarity with fine literature, he maintained, was the basis of all culture. Half an hour later, like the ghost of a tragedy-queen, Mrs. Dakers would steal in. Her husband would spring to his feet and pull up a chair for her as though she were a queen indeed: Chadshill was a school of manners as well as of literature. Then, as she listened raptly to the boom of his rich voice, Mrs. Dakers' eyes would droop, her smiling lips would relax into sagging furrows, her needle-pricked, toil-stained hand would slip from its studied posture, swollen blue veins would show above the skinny metacarpals; but as soon as the cuckoo-clock struck nine, she would wake, with a startled smile, to put the boys to bed. "Early to bed and early to rise," Mr. Dakers proclaimed. At least there was no doubt about his wife's early rising, though he was emitting the snores of conscious virtue by the time she crept into bed beside him.

Considering the versatility of their father's interests, it is difficult to imagine just where the education of the Dakers boys came in. Perhaps Mr. Dakers was right; perhaps all that a normal child needs in the way of

primary instruction is what he himself would have called a "cultural background." No doubt they were sufficiently intelligent to begin with. Certainly they were familiarized, from their earliest years, with a big vocabulary, largely poetical. They knew the names of flowers and the notes of birds, and all that the major poets—their father included—had written about both. They could keep a straight bat, a steady length, and hold a fast ball. They knew the discipline of the cold tub, the run before breakfast, and one of them at least had inherited part of his mother's beauty.

They did not mix, as I have said, with other children in Halesby. Though we were all vaguely conscious of their existence and of the family's reputation as something a little "out of the way," their first public appearance took place at one of those big Christmas parties at Mawne Hall which were the outward and visible sign of Mr. Willis's growing wealth and Mrs. Willis's abounding maternal generosity.

Mrs. Willis had only one child of her own, a girl named Lilian. Edward, the boy, whom people generally regarded as rather a queer fish, was the child of the first marriage that had brought Walter Willis prosperity. But if Edward Willis was a queer fish, the Dakers boys were obviously queerer. To begin with, they were dressed in character, like pages in a Shakespearian play, like juvenile, male versions of Mrs. Dakers, who, pale and dignified in reseda green silk, resembled Ophelia. The boys wore purple velvet

tunics and knickerbockers—Mrs. Dakers should really have spared them this humiliation—and clung to their mother's side as though they were both terrified by contact with such yelling yahoos as ourselves. Their father, it seemed, had not included in his educational scheme, instruction in ordinary children's games or dances. The queer little fish stood gasping, completely out of water, horribly shy, and at the same time, horribly envious. They knew quite well, of course, that all the rest were staring at them.

Mrs. Willis, and Lilian, who even as a child was the most natural creature living, did their best to put them at ease. Apart from their fantastic clothes they were not ill-looking. The younger was very like his mother, with hair the colour of heather honey—such as Mrs. Dakers' must have been before she dyed it—a delicate, clean-cut, and slightly tilted nose, straight lips, a trifle thin, but full of generous colour, and, in his eyes, which were darker than Mrs. Dakers' violet, indeed, and fringed by lashes genuinely, brilliantly black, a vivid and most ingratiating eagerness. His face, his eyes, his hands, the whole of his body, were full of quick, instinctive movement. Of course he was far too pretty for a boy; as a girl he would have been completely ravishing; and yet there was never any risk of mistaking his sex: there was something hard in his delicacy, something strong in his fineness, something stalwart and square about his whole "cut" that made him, whatever else he might be, indubitably male. And though

he was shy to the degree of acute suffering, those quick eyes of his were courageous, adventurous: it was clear that he wanted to share in the novel experience that surrounded him. A modern psychologist would have labelled him "extrovert."

Not so the elder boy. In him there was no trace of his mother's physical fineness; he had nothing of the thoroughbred about him. His hair was dark and coarse, and dreadfully untidy; his grey eyes heavy and grudging, without eagerness; his nose stuck on like a dab of putty, his mouth large and ill-shaped, with red full lips. Even his shyness was of a different quality. While the other, though timid, was burning to join them, this boy appeared to regard his fellow guests with mingled terror and distaste. At teatime, when the opulence of Mawne revealed itself most lavishly, he ate practically nothing, sitting disconsolate with his limbs all in a lump, physically and spiritually aloof not only from all the rest but even from his brother. And Mrs. Dakers made no attempt to put him more at his ease. All through that afternoon her eyes, her thoughts were for the younger boy. It wasn't surprising. One person only, Mrs. Martock, the wife of the Halesby doctor, angelically realized the suffering that lay behind their awkwardness. It wasn't for nothing that she was a doctor's wife. She went over to her own son, Arthur Martock, and whispered to him:

"I wish you would talk to the Dakers boys, darling."

"Must I? They look pretty awful," Arthur protested.

"Never mind that. Just to please me."

Of course he chose the younger, the lesser of two evils. When Arthur Martock spoke to him, rather grudgingly, he looked up with quick pleasure, and caught at his words as if they were a life-line.

"I say, what is your name?" Arthur had asked.

"Harold . . . Harold Dakers. What's yours?"

He told him. "Oh yes, I've heard of you," Harold said. "My people know your father."

That, of course, went without saying. Arthur was very proud of his father. A little scornfully he went on with his duty:

"And what's the other chap's name?"

"The other? Who do you mean? Oh, *him*! Why, that's my brother Jonathan. I thought everyone knew. How funny!"

"It's a jolly funny name, anyway," Arthur said.

Harold flushed slightly. "Not when you're used to it," he said defensively. He went on to explain: "You see he's named after a character in my father's play."

"It's in the Bible," Arthur replied, with conscious superiority. "He must have cribbed it from there."

"I don't think my father would do a thing like that," Harold answered indignantly.

It seemed that religious instruction had not been included in the Dakers' educational scheme. Mr. Dakers

had no patience with an institution which had frowned upon his October nutting-parties.

"My name," Harold went on, "comes from another of father's plays, the one called *Senlac*. Haven't you ever read them?"

Arthur was forced to admit that he hadn't.

"Well, you ought to, you know," said Harold. "They're really magnificent."

He spoke so emphatically that Arthur was persuaded that they were. Years afterwards he was to read both Mr. Dakers' plays. The first, from which Jonathan got his name, was called: *David—A Tragedy in Verse*. The sub-title described it adequately. For the moment, however, he felt at an intellectual disadvantage: confronted with *David*, he was nothing but a Philistine. It seemed as though they had come, even sooner than he had expected, to a dead end. If that was all that Harold Dakers could talk about, his first distrust of the family was justified. Fortunately, at that moment, the officious Mrs. Willis saved him from further embarrassment.

"Come along," she said, "come along! The girls are all going to see Lilian's doll's house; so you boys had better go and play cricket in Edward's play-room. Arthur, you know the way, take Harold and Jonathan along with you."

The prospect cheered Arthur Martock enormously. This was an opportunity for the Philistine to put these Dakers æsthetes in their place. The play-room at

Mawne was a vast barn-like structure, one of the out-buildings of the vanished Pomfrets, that Mr. Willis had fitted up as a gymnasium for his workmen. A long strip of cocoanut matting made a pitch down the middle of it. When they reached it Edward Willis and Ralph Hingston, an acknowledged leader in all sporting matters, were picking up sides.

"Hurry up!" Ralph shouted. "Edward had better take Arthur. We shall all have to field."

"What about Harold and Jonathan?" Arthur asked, conscious of Mrs. Willis's charge. It seemed natural, somehow, to mention the elder last.

"Oh, I'll make Edward a present of them too," Ralph answered contemptuously. With the cruelty of youth they all of them laughed.

Ralph lost the toss. "Look here," said Edward Willis to Arthur, let's get these blessed Dakers kids out first." He pushed the bat, without ceremony, into Harold's hands, and Harold went to his place at the batting crease.

Ralph Hingston, who fancied himself as a bowler, took the first over. Harold, very fragile and fine and pale in his velvet suit, faced him. Ralph bowled his fastest; he also wanted to get those Dakers kids out of the way. The first ball was short; it bumped and grazed Harold's temple. For a moment he looked half stunned and put his hand to his head.

"I say, Ralph, steady, old man!" Edward Willis cried. "Don't murder the kid! Give him a chance."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to," said Ralph. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, he's all right. You can bowl as fast as you like. He won't mind."

The voice, surprisingly, was Jonathan's. They were the first words he had spoken all afternoon. Everyone stared at him; there was a confident, challenging smile on his thick face. The next ball that Ralph sent down was a gentle lob, a little to the off. Harold cut it prettily through the slips. There was nothing accidental about the stroke; it was perfectly timed and placed. To the next ball, a straight one of good length, he played, correctly, forward. And so it went on, for fifteen minutes or more, during which Ralph Hingston exhausted all his bowling resources. His pace, which was usually unplayable, could make no impression on Harold. Now that his eye was in he could deal with everything; and as Ralph's frustration showed itself in looseness and violence, the child began to score all round the wicket with contemptuous ease. What is more, the rest of them realized that Harold possessed what none of them had: a style. His footwork was perfect; his bat a model of straightness; his strokes so effortless that it seemed that the ball, not the bat, was doing the work. And, all the time, a grin of acute satisfaction was spreading over Jonathan's face.

At last Ralph gave it up, and tossed the ball to Arthur Martock. Arthur's bowling fared little better than his. The fifth ball, rather shorter than the others, was driven



to long-on. Ralph Hingston jumped and held it, one-handed.

"Out!" he cried.

Harold turned to go; but Jonathan called to him:

"Stay where you are! You aren't out. It was a bum' ball. I saw it hit the matting."

"Well, *I* didn't anyway," said Ralph, "and I say he's out, so he is. Come on; next man!"

But Jonathan wasn't going to be put off. As a matter of fact, in the eyes of most of them, the catch was doubtful. With his big face flushed, Jonathan came lumbering toward Ralph.

"Harold isn't out," he repeated. "I won't have it!"

"Oh, it's all right. I don't mind, Jonathan," Harold entreated.

"But I do mind," said Jonathan stubbornly. "You're not out. He *knows* you're not out."

"D'you mean to say I'm cheating?" Ralph demanded angrily, his blue eyes blazing.

"I say he's not out."

"That's the same thing. I say he is."

"He isn't." Jonathan's face went redder than ever.

"Look here," said Ralph, "I'm not going to be called a liar by you."

"If you say Harold's out, you are one," Jonathan replied.

Then, as everyone expected, the Hingston temper exploded. Ralph was his mother's son in that at any rate. His right fist shot out and caught Jonathan full

on his inconspicuous nose. In another second they were at it, like terriers: Ralph infinitely more agile, with all the Hingston fury behind him; Jonathan, heavily blundering and dripping blood from his damaged nose, yet countering all Ralph's violent assaults with a scientific right, taking his punishment stubbornly when his guard was beaten down by Ralph's sheer force, yet giving, on the whole, as good or better than he got. On the one side picturesque fury: on the other, ungainly determination. It was useless for anyone to try to separate them. They could only see, through the storm of fisticuffs, that Ralph's right eye was bunged up, that Jonathan's lip was cut. Harold, still clutching the bat, watched them with sparkling eyes and a grim, white face.

The sudden, flustered arrival of Mrs. Willis put an end to this bloody and scandalous scene.

"He said I was a liar," Ralph explained.

"He said Harold was out. He wasn't. It was a bum'ball," Jonathan spluttered through his gore.

They stood, two battered, bloodstained figures, with Mrs. Willis, pitiful yet scandalized, between them. "Whatever shall I say to your poor mothers?" she said—thinking, no doubt, of Lady Hingston. "How wicked of you both to fight like this!"

## CHAPTER III

## LITTLE PARNASSUS

LET it suffice to say that after the Dakers' sensational debut in Halesby society, the combatants became friends—but, from the accidental proximity of their two homes, it so happened that the Dakers boys and Arthur Martock were more especially intimate. This intimacy was made easy by the fact that the exclusive Mr. Dakers approved of Arthur's father, who had saved his genius from extinction in the influenza epidemic of 1890. And Dr. Martock, though he always regarded Mr. Dakers as the joke which he was to everyone except Mrs. Dakers, derived a tolerant amusement from the new fancy his son had taken. Arthur was not ashamed of it. Indeed, after the practical way in which the Dakers brothers had shown their metal at Mawne, he was proud to know them. Some tactful person—it must have been Mrs. Willis—had evidently given their mother a hint on the subject of costume: nobody ever saw either of them in purple velvet again, and that made things easier.

From that day forward, Arthur Martock became, in holiday time, a frequenter of the gabled house at Chads-hill. While Halesby had distrusted the Dakers because they were "out of the ordinary," it was just because

they were "out of the ordinary" that he liked them. Chadshill began to represent for him not only that culture which Halesby people despised because they did not possess it, but an entirely wider and more generous conception of living, in which art and literature, music and country-lore, enriched, with the colour of conscious or unconscious allusion, the whole drab tissue of Black-Country life. Mr. Dakers was not ashamed of his traffic with the Muses. Under the damson trees of the Chadshill lawn he had erected a little bench of British oak on the back of which he had inscribed with a red-hot poker the words *Mihi et Musis*. The seat was so short that it could only accommodate, in addition to Mr. Dakers, one Muse at a time, but the thought (though Shenstone's, and not Mr. Dakers') was a happy one, and the fact that "Mihi" came first, significant. In the light of later years the figure of Mr. Dakers appears shoddy and even ridiculous. To Arthur Martock it was that of a prophet, a pioneer, a magnificent rebel, a bright archangel of the hosts of beauty.

Not only were the Dakers different from other people: they were also astonishingly different from each other. In spite of her complete surrender to her husband's selfishness, Mrs. Dakers had never submerged her personality in his. She was as distinct within her part as a character in a play, and Mr. Dakers, the author of this particular drama, took pains to keep her there.

The brothers, again, were as different as though they belonged to distinct zoological species. If Harold re-

sembled his mother, the likeness was merely superficial. Although that clear-cut physical perfection perpetuated the beauty which had (perhaps) charmed thousands in Lavinia Lord's theatrical career, the sheerly ornamental part of it, its exquisite colour and form, was the least important. For Mrs. Dakers' beauty, sedulously staged in the shaded lights of the Chadshill study, was essentially static; while Harold's was the most dynamic imaginable: the expression of a complete and balanced muscular co-ordination not only in those relatively gross movements by which his handling of a cricket-bat had made the rest of Mrs. Willis's guests look oafish and clumsy, but in every other movement which his muscles made. It showed itself in his walk, in his speech, in his gestures, in the least motion of a finger, an eyelid or a nostril. It revealed itself, again, in the reactions of his mind—not because he was actually cleverer than Jonathan or Arthur, but because all its processes seemed rapid and precise, as if the medium in which they operated were of a curious, crystalline clarity. There were no mists or rolling clouds in Harold's mind. There was in fact, in his whole composition, something that, for want of a better, could only be described by the word aristocratic. In an access of hero-worship Arthur Martock once remarked on this to Mr. Dakers.

"Yes, yes," he responded, cryptically, "blood will tell."

He didn't specify whether the blood which told was his or Mrs. Dakers', and left Arthur thrilled by all

sorts of romantic conjectures that derived from their recent reading of *Harry Richmond*. He gave him the impression that it would be tactless to make further enquiries into a mystery that was anything but discreditable; but it was only a few weeks later, when sudden necessity compelled Arthur to enter the smallest and most intimate chamber of Chadshill, that he discovered the secret at which Mr. Dakers had hinted.

There, on the wall, at the level of his eyes, was suspended a sheet of parchment in black gothic script with illuminated capitals surmounted by a coat of arms and a crest. A furtive reading showed him that these were the armorial bearings of Eugene Dakers, of Chadshill, in the County of Worcester, Esquire, and that he derived them, originally, from Eugene d'Acre, Gentleman, knighted on the field of Acre, in Palestine, by Richard Cœur de Lion, King of Britain and France, for gallantry against the Saracen. This Eugene d'Acre had issue—any number of them. One of these, Sir Philip d'Acre, had been a churchman: Dean of (Blank) in the Diocese of (Blank). Another of his descendants, Wilfrid, was “possessed of fair landes and manours in the County of (Blank), but, unfortunately espousing the King's cause in the late wars, was deprived of them.” This Wilfrid had a daughter, Alison, who, marrying, for the third time, a cousin of Lord Chancellor the Earl of Clarendon, was therefore second cousin, once removed of their majesties

*QUEEN MARY and QUEEN ANNE.*

The italic capitals atoned for a multitude of blanks. Conscious of the circumstances in which he had derived his information, Arthur felt it would be indelicate ever to allude to the Dakers' august connections; but ever afterwards, and particularly when he discovered a seal with a corroborative crest on Mr. Dakers' writing table, he was aware that Harold's aristocracy was no mere physical accident. The Dakers had royal blood in their veins! Or was it, rather, that the Royal Family had Dakers blood in theirs?

Certainly there were no signs of this rare ichor in Jonathan—nor even of ordinary Dakers blood, for that matter. As Mr. Dakers grudgingly affirmed: "It is almost difficult to believe that he is the child of either of us. Considering Lavinia's beauty. . . ." He hesitated; but the words 'and my intellect' might almost have been spoken.

Jonathan was evidently a disappointment to his father. Not that he was without brains: in quantity his wits were as good as Harold's; in quality they were as different from each other as Skye and Sicily. In Harold's brain all things were well-ordered and clean-cut as an intaglio; the mind of Jonathan was full of mountainous shapes clouded and shadowed words and images from which clear concepts and details were isolated with a difficulty that showed itself in his knitted brows and puzzled eyes. He got to the same point as Harold, who was four years his junior, a short length behind; but in process of arriving there he must have covered

a course three times as long—a course impeded by all sorts of dubious obstacles, side-tracked through devious blind-alleys of speculation. He came in bravely, like a battered coaster, close-hauled and drenched with salt; his very lateness gave an air of gallantry to his arrival. His humour, too, was slower in reaction than Harold's; a rumble of low laughter came long after its flash, like distant thunder. With Harold impact and report were almost simultaneous, like those of a rifle-shot. The quality was different too. While Harold's quick-fire was mostly for other people, Jonathan's slow humour was usually concentrated on himself. He had plenty of opportunity for exercising it; for Mr. Dakers and Harold were always making fun of him.

And then, to crown his father's disappointment, Jonathan had little of Harold's aptitude for games. It wasn't for want of trying. Indeed he made himself moderately good at all of them, but invariably in the less spectacular departments of each—the scrum at football (Harold was a wing threequarter), the field at cricket, long distances at running. As a boxer he had already shown his quality in his encounter with Ralph Hingston at the Willis's Christmas party; but even there it was sheer determination and endurance rather than inspired boxing that had pulled him through. Also, on that occasion—and this is most important—Harold had been involved.

It would have been difficult to find a devotion more loyally sustained than Jonathan's for Harold. Of



course Harold was fond of him; but Jonathan's attitude toward Harold was one of adoration. Adoration for Harold was the keynote of family life at Chadshill: for Mr. Dakers he was the unique vessel that contained the blood of their crusading ancestors; and even Mrs. Dakers, who might have been expected to cherish a predilection for her firstborn, acquiesced in her husband's choice in this matter as in everything else. Nobody, in point of fact, accepted the distinction more readily than Jonathan. Ever since he had been able to think he had had it rubbed into him that Harold was, in some mysterious but indisputable way, a creature wholly superior to himself. Not only did he accept the distinction, he was ready to proclaim it, and, if the need arose (as we have seen at Mawne) to shed his blood in defence of it. If Harold had asked him to black his boots he would have thought it a natural request. As a matter of fact the statuesque Mrs. Dakers attended to all that sort of thing. It was the crowning achievement of a selfishness that amounted to genius—and was, indeed, his only title to that word—that Mr. Dakers contrived to keep his wife a household drudge and a perfect Rossetti at the same time.

Still, Arthur Martock had no cause for complaint. His intimacy at Chadshill opened a new world to him, and Mr. Dakers, let it be admitted, was that world's creator. Among many memories of it, the events of a certain summer (in his visions of Chadshill it is always summer) were stamped with a peculiar distinctness on

Arthur's mind. At that time Jonathan must have been about sixteen; a tall figure in white flannel trousers that he had outgrown, his big face made unsightly by the pimples of adolescence, a dark down beginning to sprout irregularly on his upper lip and chin. Harold, at heaven knows what sacrifice on the part of Mrs. Dakers, had been sent to Harrow. Jonathan was a day-boy at King Edward's Grammar School in North Bromwich, and travelled in to the city every morning in a third class carriage next to his father's first. He also had the privilege of carrying his father's dispatch-case. In the middle of the summer came the fortnight of Mr. Dakers' annual holiday, and his ebullient spirits coloured all their days.

There never was a better holiday companion than Mr. Dakers. For sheer boyish enthusiasm he put them all to shame. He had the faculty, rare among grown-ups, of treating them as equals and talking to them as contemporaries. Those were the great days of the English road, when the fashion for bicycling had created a new smoothness of blue Cleve granite macadam, before the hedgerow roses became powdered with the dust of motor-cars. It must have been June; for tarnished hawthorn still heaped the hedges, and the first, the redder roses were in bloom. They all had bicycles—all, that is, except Mrs. Dakers; but you couldn't imagine a perfect Rossetti on a bicycle—and Mr. Dakers took them for long rides and cottage-teas in the low green hills of Shropshire, beyond the Severn.

Away he flew spinning downhill in front of them with his feet up, his bald brown head thrown back, trolling out to the lazuline sky an appropriate snatch of Schubert:

*Sah ein Knab' ein Röslein stehn,  
Röslein auf der Haiden!*

(He was never at a loss for the right allusion in song or poetry.) Harold and Jonathan and Arthur came rushing down behind him, in a soft whirr and swish of pneumatic tyres, intoxicated by this new splendour of swift motion, with the warm blood singing through their limbs, the warm wind blowing through their hair. Sometimes Mr. Dakers would call on them to stop, and show them some strange flower that he had spotted in the hedgerow, for he had the uncanny eye of a good field-naturalist. Sometimes they would pile their bicycles against the wall of a village churchyard, and Mr. Dakers, leading them inside, would reconstruct the church's architectural origins: a Saxon font, a Norman arch bricked up in the chancel, the stairs that led to an abandoned rood-loft. They would stand hatless, in the cool odour of old stone, while his quick eye deciphered the worn epitaph of some mailed crusader, lying with his legs crossed above the knee, or those of coloured, doll-like effigies of Carolean children grouped like solemn puppies about their mother's bier. Nobody could make the past live as vividly as Mr. Dakers. In these moments he seemed, himself a reincarnation

of dead chivalry: Sir Eugene d'Acre, kneeling to Richard Cœur de Lion's accolade.

Scores of such memories sanctified that one summer; of peerless skies over Bredon, of boating days, when Severn ran so swift that, at the Folly rapid, the boys must jump overboard, thigh-deep, and drag the skiff upstream, of wide bean-fields in flower, of Evesham apple-blossom; day after day without a cloud that was not gleaming white, an endless procession of purely male delights, to which Mrs. Dakers contributed nothing but those admirable Chadshill suppers, at which Mr. Dakers initiated them into the mysteries of dressing salads.

And those Chadshill evenings were as inspiring as the long days. A soft air breathed over the gorse of Uffdown, carrying almond-scented odours and green gusts of bracken on its wings. Behind them the shadow of that great hill loomed benignantly; before them, beyond wide-open lattices, stretched a deep sky of luminous, limpid indigo, through which the furnace jets of the Black Country, the myriad scintillations of ever-burning pit-mounds, resembled an infinite æther in which new fiery worlds were momentarily being born. Perched thus comfortably on the verge of infinity, with a sweet open-air tiredness in their veins, a feast of reason supplemented the more material delicacies of Mrs. Dakers' kitchen. In other words, they listened to poetry.

It was Mr. Dakers himself who dictated the programme. It usually began with some great scene of

drama, such as that of Ophelia's madness, or Bathsheba's soliloquy from *David: A Tragedy in Verse*: but a moment always arrived at which Mrs. Dakers would rebel.

"Don't you think we might hear your new sonnet, Eugene?" she would ask with a rich persuasiveness.

"Nonsense, my love. Of course not. These little things of mine are only amusing to myself. Besides it isn't finished yet. I'm still dissatisfied with the sestet."

"Isn't he the most modest man you've ever heard of?" Mrs. Dakers would ask. "If only he'd realize how we are longing to hear it."

"Oh, *do*, father!" Harold and Jonathan would entreat.

"Ridiculous! But if you force me, I suppose I must. Jonathan, the manuscript is inside the Florentine case on my table. If I might trouble you."

Even to Jonathan, whom he habitually neglected, Mr. Dakers was always polite. And when Jonathan had returned with the manuscript his father would clear his throat and begin to boom:

*Here in a dream of ancient peace I lie;  
The City's voice is now so faint and far  
That I might be some watcher on a star  
Who sees the other worlds go wheeling by  
Through the abysmal depths of space and sky  
Amaze, yet hardly knowing what they are  
Till their fires reel beyond the glimmering bar  
Of his horizon into . . . mystery.*

"That is the end of the octet." Mr. Dakers readjusted his glasses. "From that point onward I am rather indefinite." He began to mumble rapidly: "*Here too I leave the feet of Time behind, and rest a king of surely-castled pride; my voice no herald but the whispering wind*—no, no, that can't be right: that's nonsense. *Voice no herald?*—the papers are mixed up!" He began to shuffle them with increasing irritation. "*My castle walls are privet dark and trim; my guards yon rank of stately hollyhocks*. Lavinia, this is ridiculous; somebody's been at my papers! Jonathan, you must have shuffled them on the way down."

"I'm sure I didn't, father," Jonathan mildly protested.

But Mr. Dakers was thoroughly rattled. "In any case the whole effect has been spoiled. Why will you persist in making a fool of me, Lavinia?"

"I think it was perfectly lovely as far as it went, Eugene" said Mrs. Dakers soothingly. "To me it is reminiscent of . . . of Keats."

"Reminiscent? My dear Lavinia, I sincerely hope it isn't reminiscent of anybody!" He stared at the manuscript gloomily. "Well, well, perhaps you are right, I must admit it. *Amaze, yet hardly knowing what they are*. Yes, Keats might have written that line. *Looked at each other with a wild surmise*. I may as well destroy it."

Their hearts came into their mouths as he made as though he would tear up the manuscript with a move-

ment that was nicely calculated to allow Mrs. Dakers to rescue it unharmed from his fingers. But Mr. Dakers, though mollified by her concern, was still inclined to be petulant, and, before they had time to think, Mrs. Dakers had burst, magnificently, into Mr. Dakers' version of David's Lament over Jonathan:

*Upon high places the beauty of Israel  
Is slain. How are the mighty fallen now!  
In Gath you shall not tell it; nor shall you  
Publish it in the streets of Askalon,  
So that the daughters of the Philistines  
May not rejoice, nor the uncircumcized triumph.*

"You will notice," Mr. Dakers whispered to Arthur, "that the last line has a redundant syllable, even accounting for the elision of 'the-uncircumcized.' I was taking no liberties with the original, and keeping so close to it that I thought the license justified. Yes, Lavinia, we are listening. . . ."

*Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be  
No dew, nor even drops of rain on you,  
Nor fields of offering. For there the shield  
Of mighty ones is vilely cast away—  
The shield of Saul, as though it had not been  
Anointed with the oil of Samuel.*

Mr. Dakers gave a swift glance in Arthur's direction to see if he approved the cadence of this masterly

emendation. With a rising voice Mrs. Dakers continued:

*From red blood of the slain, from the rich fat  
Of mighty ones the bow of Jonathan  
Turnéd not back, the valiant sword of Saul  
Returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan  
Were lovely and were pleasant in their lives  
And even in death they could not be divided.  
Swifter than eagles were they, stronger far  
Than lions. O, ye daughters of Israel  
Weep over Saul, who clothéd you in scarlet. . . .*

"The next verse of the original" Mr. Dakers explained. "is mere monotonous repetition. '*How are the mighty fallen*' comes in again and again. In the theatre, of course, you must hold the attention of an average audience, so I decided to cut the repetitions out." He nodded to Mrs. Dakers who went on wailfully:

*I am distressed for thee, my brother, Jonathan;  
Thou hast been very pleasant unto me.  
Thy love for me was wondrous; it surpassed  
The love of women. How are the mighty fallen  
And gone for ever all the weapons of war!*

Mrs. Dakers closed the book reverently, with a sigh. "After that," she said, "I think anything else would sound feeble, Eugene."

And Mr. Dakers bowed his head in assent. There



was no affectation. He was deeply and genuinely moved by his own verses.

That night, the last of their holiday, Arthur was sleeping at Chadshill, in the dank, bare little backroom, with sagging iron bedsteads, which, naturally, had been allotted to Jonathan. All through that open-air fortnight he had been conscious of a growing sympathy and understanding between them, divining, beneath that shy, unpromising exterior, qualities that touched him more closely than Harold's evident charm; and yet it came as a surprise to him when Jonathan suddenly broke out into confidences.

"That stuff of father's," he said, "sounds pretty awful when you think of the original."

Arthur admitted that, on the whole, the original was better.

"He says that it has to be adapted to suit the stage," he suggested.

"To suit the stage? Tommy-rot! Listen to this."

Jonathan took down a Bible from the bookcase and began to read that great lament in the words of the Authorised Version. *From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, the sword of Saul returned not empty.* Those splendid phrases, wave after wave of grand and tragic rhythm, gave to his voice a depth, a passion that Arthur had never heard in it before. "*How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!*" Jonathan waved his arms helplessly. "That's what I mean by

poetry!" he cried. "When I read that, I know what a ghastly sham father is. His rotten little sonnets. . . . Keats. Alfred Austin, and bad Alfred Austin at that!"

"He mayn't be a great poet," Arthur admitted, "but he's wonderful good company. And he knows an awful lot too, I'm jolly glad to have the chance of being with a man like him. There's nobody to touch him in Halesby."

Jonathan smiled and shook his head hopelessly. He looked particularly unattractive, hunched up in his patched pyjamas on the sagging bed. "He's a sham . . . just a damned sham. He's a mountain of selfishness. If he were a great poet, it wouldn't matter so much. His poetry's just rotten bad imitation; he's never said or done an original thing in his life. Its mother, poor darling, who has to suffer from his selfishness. Nobody in the world knows what an angel she's been. There's nobody like her."

He burst out into a long, impassioned panegyric on Mrs. Dakers. He said so little habitually, his lumbering silence was taken so much for granted, that Arthur had never realized how devoted he was to her. Now, as Jonathan opened his heart, that devotion struck Arthur as horribly pathetic, because he knew, a great deal better, probably, than Jonathan, how little thought Mrs. Dakers gave to him in return. She was so used, poor woman, to accepting her husband's standards in everything, that all her hopes and interests were centred in Harold. It was

almost as if Jonathan had guessed what the other was thinking.

"Harold's all right," he said. "Harold's a topping kid. The only possible danger is that father may spoil him. He'll begin to take mother's slaving for granted, just like father does. But heaven knows what's going to happen to us all."

"What do you mean?"

"This education business. We really can't afford it. Of course I'm only too glad that they've sent Harold to Harrow; he's bound to play at Lord's—that's father's principal ambition. I'm only wondering how long we can keep it up. I happen to know, from what mother's said, that father's dreadfully in debt."

"You wouldn't think it, to see how he enjoys himself."

"No, that's the worst of it. He's absolutely immoral. As long as he gets his glass of wine at dinner he thinks God's in his heaven and all's right with the world."

He blew out the candle. On the worn carpet between them the summer moonlight threw a filigree shadow of torn lace curtain. The night was still, of a holy quietness. Only a corncrake grating in the long grass, and sometimes, from far away, the faint metallic thunders of the steel-rolling mills at Mawne. They lay in silence, with eyes wide open. Arthur knew, for certain, that Jonathan had more to say. The darkness encouraged him.

"You see," he went on, "sooner or later there'll be an

awful smash. It's mother and Harold who'll suffer. I don't count."

It was true that he didn't count; he had never counted.

"Well, what can you *do* about it?" Arthur asked.

"Nothing. That's just the rotten part of it. I have a little money that my uncle left me. Father's the trustee, unfortunately. It doesn't come to me till I'm eighteen—nineteen—I forget. Anyway I'm leaving school next term."

"What are you going to do?"

"I've got to be a doctor somehow or other. Ever since I was a kid I've wanted to be one. I've been sweating like hell to get a scholarship at North Bromwich. The exam's in September. They say I've got a fair chance. Of course I'm not a brilliant devil like old Harold. When once I'm qualified I shall be able to look after all of them. But it takes five years, and anything may happen in that time. It's only right that Harold should go up to Cambridge. He'll get his blue for certain. Meanwhile it's a sort of race against time. With luck I may do it by the skin of my teeth. . . By the skin of my teeth," he repeated; and in the darkness, Arthur could imagine the knitted brows, the clenched jaw that he had seen so long before, on the day when Jonathan squared up to Ralph Hingston at Mawne.

"Well, there's one good thing anyway," Arthur told him, "we shall be together. I'm going to the North Bromwich Medical School as well. My father and

grandfather were there before me. That means we shall see a lot of each other, I expect. We'll be able to work together. That'll be awful fun. And after all," he encouraged him, "what is five years?"

Of course, at seventeen, five years were nothing. But Jonathan, somehow or other, was old before his time. A little wind had risen, moving from the West; a gust, sweet with mown hay, invaded the mean bedroom. Jonathan drew a deep sigh.

"Yes, that sounds good. I'm glad we're friends. We are friends, aren't we?"

"Friends?" Arthur Martock repeated. "I should jolly well think we are!"

They held their breath, Mr. and Mrs. Dakers were coming upstairs to bed. Arthur heard the word "Harold" several times repeated. The voice of Mr. Dakers was more irritable than usual. It seemed to Arthur, listening and suspicious, that his step was a trifle unsteady.

## CHAPTER IV

### MIHI ET MUSIS

HAPPILY, for the moment, none of Jonathan's gloomy forebodings were realized. The financial sky brightened temporarily. Jonathan won his scholarship at North Bromwich, and Harold his second eleven colours at Harrow; but while Harold's easy achievement was blazoned everywhere by Mr Dakers, Jonathan's, which represented a positively heroic grind, was just taken for granted, as being the very least thing that could be expected from a son of the author of *David*. The Dakers' intellectual singularity was axiomatic; Jonathan had done nothing more than his duty.

The romantic friendship to which Martock and Jonathan had pledged themselves that night at Chadshill did not materialize. Everything seemed against it. While Arthur took up his quarters in diggings in Easy Row, a shabby street of lodging-houses patronized by students, Jonathan, for reasons of economy, was compelled to go on living at Chadshill, coming into North Bromwich daily on the same train as his father (though in a different class) and returning to the shadow of those blessed hills at night.

Other circumstances, hardly creditable to Martock, conspired against their friendship. The upstart Uni-

versity of North Bromwich was exceedingly conscious of social distinctions. Early in the first term the men of their year divided themselves into groups. A sharp line separated the public-schoolboys from those who came from the City's day-schools. Arthur was within the pale, and Jonathan outside it; and with the natural timidity of a freshman Arthur accepted the demarcation. Most of them again had just reached that hobbledehoy stage of adolescence in which clothes become a matter of prime importance. Jonathan's were deplorable. He had been growing far too rapidly for Mrs. Dakers' narrow resources; and since Harold, at Harrow, naturally came first, the unfortunate Jonathan suffered. It is improbable that Mrs. Dakers realized the humiliations to which she subjected him. She herself was a little vague about clothes in any case; for herself the problem had been solved by standardization; and Jonathan, with the family finances always in mind, was far too proud and considerate to protest.

At Chadshill, out in the country, such matters were unimportant. In the dissecting rooms or lecture-theatres at North Bromwich, among town-bred young men, they became conspicuous. In the last year Jonathan had shot up like a beanstalk. He must have been six feet two at least, and his shabby grey flannel trousers, even though he wore them unfashionably turned down, seemed to retreat in terror from the clumping boots, whose hobnails rang loudly on the bare floors of tile and concrete wherever he went. His coat-sleeves, too, shot up over

his bony wrists, his neck shot up out of his collars, so that the chief impression that he gave was one of ungainly extremities; huge hands and feet, and a head whose undistinguished features were not improved by steel-rimmed reading spectacles with circular, owlsh lenses. As he moved about with the long strides of a farm-labourer, he looked like an intruder from some uncouth and rustic world.

If he had decided to play games, he might easily have attained an eccentric popularity. But, even in North Bromwich, played games cost money in railway fares, and Jonathan had not even shillings to spare—nothing beyond the pittance that Mrs. Dakers gave him weekly for his lunch. It never occurred to anyone at Chadshill that he could possibly be in need of pocket-money, and Jonathan was far too proud to ask for it.

Of course, in a distant way, Arthur and he were always friendly, bidding each other good day by their Christian names, exchanging a word and a smile whenever they met but apart from such casual encounters they had no contact; Jonathan's delicacy in realizing that their worlds were different relieved Arthur of the cowardly necessity of letting him know it, though that savage and hungry figure was always something of a reproach to him.

Fortunately for Arthur's conscience, Jonathan generally looked quite cheerful about it; he went his own way with a broad smile on his face, accepting the difference between his position and Martock's as he had accepted that between himself and Harold. And, in spite of his



distressingly narrow circumstances, those early days of Jonathan's at North Bromwich were happy. Of course he was lonely; the absence of his adored Harold left him without a single confidant on earth, since neither Mr. Dakers nor his mother imagined he was worth speaking to. Yet there was something triumphant in his loneliness. From earliest childhood he had wanted to be a doctor, and now, however meanly, that ambition was being realized. He had a dogged, insatiable hunger for knowledge—pure scientific knowledge, for its own sake; he wanted to know: and here lay all knowledge open to him. The dry preliminaries of medical training, those ancillary sciences whose rudiments the student must master before he proceeds to real professional work, were matters of high adventure to Jonathan. The smell of chlorine, that made his nostrils tingle in the chemical laboratory, haunted him like a passion. He approached a physical text-book rapturously, as though it were a romance; and in anatomy, where the first secrets of medicine proper were unfolded, he found the ecstasies of a religious mystery. Late in the afternoon, when all the rest had gone, he might be seen, scalpel in hand, crouched like a vulture above a half-dissected cadaver, until its secrets penetrated his mind and filled it, even as the odours of the dissecting-room permeated his shabby clothes.

A lonely life, remote, yet strangely full of rapture. Apart from compulsory attendance at lectures, this slavery was his first taste of freedom. The repressed,

neglected child of Chadshill was growing up with a surprising rapidity. In Harold's absence nobody at home took any notice of him. For lack of human relationship he supplemented his scientific passion with an ardent quest for beauty elsewhere. He found it, in solitary adventure, among his father's books and on the windy hills. For lack of Harold, he fell in love with a countryside; with the deep hazel alleys of Uffmoor Wood, the golden furzy dome of Uffdown; with intimate sheltered beauties of the Sling valley, fringed by resinous pinewoods; with changing, cloudy splendours of distant Wales. He knew them all, more intimately perhaps, than any living soul. They were interfused in his blood and graven on his heart. He knew them in all seasons and all weathers, and loved them never more than when great winds were blowing, when solemn, terrible clouds came surging from the South-West, when all the plain was lost in driving rain.

He loved them most, perhaps, because of their poignant contrast with North Bromwich. Yet, even in that wilderness of sooty brick, he found strange delights; loafing, when he should have been eating lunch, among the empty carts stacked round the market hall, and looking, for all the world, like a lout from the country driven in with them; mingling, on market days, with the rustic crowds that gaped about the cheap-jack's stalls; standing, enraptured, before certain pictures (not Rossetti's) in the Art Gallery, or mediæval craftwork in the Museum. Which meant, in short, that his transplanta-

tion to the rich, stimulant soil of North Bromwich had started, in Jonathan, a period of new growth, a development that was more potent perhaps and more intense from the very fact that it was inward and secret. Not a soul knew what he was reading, seeing, thinking, brooding on. Not even his mother. All that his friends saw was that, physically, he was growing fast and ungracefully; his big, loose limbs, his broad shoulders, now gave an impression of power as well as uncouthness.

He looked, in fact, an extremely ugly customer; and, little by little, that very ugliness, combined with a slow, perpetual good nature, gave him a position of his own among the men of his year at North Bromwich. Without any effort on his part he became accepted as a personality; and the mere fact that he was so consistent in conduct and humour and appearance made him more popular than many others who would have given their souls for popularity. It was the reward of a supreme superficial mediocrity. If any of them had looked beneath the surface in those days they would probably have been startled. However, nobody did.

He moved, in those days, among marvels, drifting like a cloud; yet his life carried too heavy a ballast to allow him to become light-headed. Living at Chads-hill, without Harold to see the funny side of it, was pretty ghastly; indeed, Jonathan began to wonder if there was, or ever had been a funny side to it. The expense of education, which apparently had never entered into Mr. Dakers' calculations, combined with the

slump that followed the Boer War to throw him on his beam-ends. At the time of the boys' birth he had contemplated a brilliant future; himself acclaimed as the great poetical dramatist of the age. It seemed now as if he would be forced to surrender the last prerogative of his gentility, his glass of wine at dinner. Of course, being Eugene Dakers, he did nothing of the sort. By way of protest, he doubled it, and supplemented it with other refreshments out of a black bottle that went into North Bromwich in the dispatch-case and kept him company during the business day. Both Jonathan and his mother knew that Mr. Dakers was drinking, but neither breathed a word to the other about it: Jonathan because he couldn't trust himself to be moderate and was afraid of hurting the one person (after Harold) whom he adored; Mrs. Dakers because there had been established between them a convention that her husband, by virtue of his genius, stood above the ordinary laws of humanity. It had also been established that Chadshill represented the home-life of a cultured English family in its perfection. The least hint of criticism, on the part of anyone but Mr. Dakers, was sacrilegious; and Jonathan, who burned at times to speak the truth, if only for five minutes, knew that his mother would be infinitely happier in starving herself—it had come to that—and keeping up the pretence that Mr. Dakers was a brilliant young genius, a little wayward, as genius had a right to be, than in realizing what he was: a fifth-rate, sodden, sentimental egotist, as cruel as only a sentimentalist could

be. How cruel he was, the numbed soul of Mrs. Dakers, providentially, never felt. But Jonathan knew, and hated him for it with a hatred that poisoned all his life at Chadshill.

He did what he could. He tried to make things easy for her, taking on his own shoulders the heavier and more humiliating share of her domestic duties. Mrs. Dakers accepted it all with the cold stateliness of a queen in a tragedy. She took his tenderness, his solicitude as a matter of course—not as a token of the love that Jonathan bore her, but as a just contribution toward the exactions that her husband, rightfully, imposed. She was playing, with dignity, the part for which the family dramatist had cast her. Jonathan was another actor in the same play; and her rare embraces had the unreal quality of a stage-kiss.

So Jonathan cracked the coals and blacked the grate, and starved, as much as he dared without attracting notice, in order that his mother might not starve herself; and slaved at Anatomy and Physiology, and read Milton, and drank in beauty, living a life as full of ecstasies and abasements as one can well imagine, while, all the time, that sombre stage was waiting for nothing but Harold's holidays.

He was the bright particular star of the Chadshill drama. As soon as he arrived the band struck up, the stage was flooded with limelight. Brilliantly, indifferently, charmingly, like a gilded *jeune premier*, he entered into his own. And instantly Chadshill became,

once more, the scene of a gay and cultured English country life, Mr. Dakers a wise, benevolent, cultivated poet of manly tastes; Mrs. Dakers a Shakespeare heroine—albeit a trifle faded; Jonathan a well-meaning, but charitably tolerated clown.

He knew the part so well that, as soon as the cue was given, he could pick it up again and play with the best of them. He played it mechanically, dutifully, but with personal reservations. It soon became apparent, for instance, that Harold, who, in spite of his fewer years, had always been the leader in their alliance and continued to assert his leadership as a natural right, was still a child—a brilliant, handsome child—while Jonathan had become a man.

Harold, after three years, was now an ornament of Harrow society. He was a prefect, he had taken six wickets at Winchester and made fifty-five not out against Eton at Lord's. He was dashing and Byronic, in the Harrow tradition. His clothes were as elegant and clean-cut as the body they covered; his speech knew refinements of which Jonathan's was innocent; his wit was as bright, his laugh as gay as ever. And yet, as Jonathan thought it over in his stubborn way, it was slowly borne in on him that the difference between them was not merely one of language or custom. In spirit they had drifted whole worlds apart. And where, in former days, Jonathan's highest desire had been to move on Harold's bright and superficial plane, he now realized that nothing could be further removed from his ambi-

tion. He had so much within him now that he knew it would be idle to expect Harold to share: the deep and sombre marvels of the human body, which Jonathan's medical studies had unveiled, held, for Harold, no more than the satisfaction of a callow sexual curiosity: the solemn splendours of *Samson Agonistes*, the intricate webs of Platonic philosophy (in which Jonathan's dogged feet were already entangled) meant as little to Harold as those strange admonitions of beauty, which fades and is eternal, that Jonathan had read in the fiery letters of great sunsets or pursued into the recesses of darkening plains.

He loved his brother as much as ever; he subscribed passionately, to the last letter of the family's traditional devotion; he entered eagerly into the jolly, healthy, boyish holiday atmosphere, on which Mr. Dakers insisted; but he realized, all the time, that he himself was a boy no longer, while neither Harold nor Mr. Dakers had ever grown up.

For a time, at any rate, this holiday spirit was very pleasant. Of course even in that well-regulated family, accidents would happen, and at one of these accidents Arthur Martock was forced embarrassingly, to assist. Mr. Dakers, with childish delight in renewing what he called "old times," had made a sentimental plan of repeating the Bewdley water-party. Once more they rowed up-Severn; once more, but this time how easily! they breasted the Folly Rapids; once more, by Arley Ferry, they pulled the skiff into a reedy backwater and

bathed. When they had dried themselves Mr. Dakers recited an impromptu poem that he had just written in which "heaven" rhymed with "Severn." All through it, Arthur could see Jonathan's grey eyes glowering at Mr. Dakers from the bottom of the boat. He looked so cross and irritated that Arthur felt almost bound to overdo his congratulations to Mr. Dakers, and Mr. Dakers lapped them up like honey, which they were. His beaming acknowledgments simply sent Jonathan mad. Speaking slowly, with an infinite scorn in that low, rumbling voice of his, he said:

"Yes, there's another poem about the Severn."

"Indeed, Jonathan?" Mr. Dakers answered, with half a sneer. "I didn't know that you were particularly interested in the Arts."

Jonathan began to recite:

*Sabrina fair,  
Listen where thou art sitting,  
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,  
In twisted braids of lilies knitting  
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;  
Listen, for dear honour's sake,  
Goddess of the silver lake,  
Listen, and save!  
  
Listen and appear to us,  
In name of great Oceanus,  
By the earth-shaking Neptune's mace,  
And Tethys' grave majestic pace;*



*By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,  
By scaly Triton's winding shell.  
And old soothsaying Glaucus' spell;  
By Leucothea's lovely hands . . .*

"Thank you, my dear Jonathan," Mr. Dakers interrupted. "I think that will do." He turned to Arthur. "Of course, that's Milton."

"Yes," said Jonathan, darkly rumbling, "and that's Poetry."

It was startling enough to bring down the blue sky, or force the Severn to flow backward and uphill to Plynllymmon. In that rumble of Jonathan's resounded years of thundery suppression. This was the first of many occasions on which his habitual good-humour was to be rent, surprisingly, by one flash of simple, devastating truth.

The phenomenon was new to Mr. Dakers. He blinked and started, as though lightning had flickered into his eyes. An unpleasant flush mounted, suffusing the network of congested veins which darkened his cheeks; into his red and watery eyes there came a cruel, birdlike look. Arthur had never known, till that moment, how deeply Mr. Dakers hated Jonathan. Harold, as tactful as ever, cut in with some feeble joke of his own. Mr. Dakers smiled wryly. For Harold's sake, and for the sake of the family solidarity, he let the insult pass. For Jonathan's rudeness—and, of course, it was very rude—he returned nothing but a gentlemanly forbearance which

made Jonathan, who was already ashamed of himself, more sorry than ever.

Even so, the incident must have rankled; for, on the way home, riding ahead with Arthur, Mr. Dakers explained to him his own position with regard to Milton. "It has always seemed to me," he said, "that Milton is a very much over-rated poet. An academic writer. Just the right type to have been the Puritan Cromwell's secretary. We English are a gay race. In a work like his *Paradise Lost* there is little gaiety, and even less of that quality which the French call *esprit*."

Arthur agreed.

"As for my own small works," Mr. Dakers went on rather breathlessly, for the hill was against them, "I think it may be justly said that I know my own place. That place is not Milton's. I have no ambition in the direction of vast, gloomy scenic effects. I have no wish to be referred to as the Doré of English letters." He waved his hand; his front wheel wobbled dangerously toward Arthur's. "It is enough for me," he panted, "to be remembered in the fulness of time by a little lyric here and there, a stray flower, springing from the red earth that I love—*this earth, this land, this England*. Hang it! My front tyre's flat!"

As a mark of magnanimity he allowed Jonathan to mend the puncture. Jonathan, as he remarked contemptuously, had a mechanical mind; he himself had been born out of his time in this age of machinery. He washed his hands of it. He lay luxuriously stretched

on that wild hill-top, while Jonathan, with hands that were torn and grimy, wrestled with his deflated tyre.

But that was not the last disaster in this unlucky day. When they arrived at Chadshill, late for supper, they found Mrs. Dakers sadly posed above the privet hedge in the character of Mariana in the Moated Grange. Mr. Dakers waved to her gaily:

"Here we are, at last, my love," he said. He gave the others to understand that none of the day's untoward happenings should mar, for her, the joy of their return. But Mrs. Dakers, for once, did not return his smile.

"I want to speak to you, Eugene," she said; and then to Arthur, "Will you and Harold wait here in the garden a moment while Jonathan puts the bicycles away?"

She swam with slow and tragic steps toward the house like Lady Macbeth approaching her victim's room. Mr. Dakers followed her. From within there came a murmur of voices much less cultivated than his. Harold and Arthur stared at each other wonderingly. The situation was sinister. Jonathan came back from the cycle-shed and joined them. "What's all this mystery?" he asked. They shook their heads.

Then, suddenly, Mr. Dakers appeared in the doorway and beckoned to them.

"Come along, come along, young men! I'm hungry as a hunter. Harold, my boy, will you mix the salad? I have important business in the cellar this evening." He laughed excitedly. "Jonathan, you had better finish

laying the table. Put plenty of silver on. This is a great occasion."

He laughed again, and waved his arms. Could it be possible, Arthur wondered, that the Dakers family had come into a fortune? But how should one reconcile that with the sombre mysteriousness of Mrs. Dakers' greeting? Whatever it may have been, his sudden excitement was infectious. While Harold mixed the dressing and Jonathan set the table in the dining-room they all talked and laughed together, forgetting, for the first time, that awkward moment on the river. A few moments later Mr. Dakers joined them. His face was still covered with smiles. In one hand he carried a magnum of champagne, in the other a squat bottle of Benedictine.

"Two more glasses, please, Jonathan," he cried. "We have distinguished company this evening." The cork popped gaily; champagne creamed and hissed in seven glasses. Mrs. Dakers appeared, more tragically ceremonious than ever, with a cold shoulder of mutton, from which thick slices had been cut, on a pewter salver. Mr. Dakers, with gallant alacrity, bowed her to her chair.

"Take your glass, Lavinia, my love," he cried. "One sip, to please me. I have a toast to propose." He held his own at arm's length: "To the Sheriff of the Worcestershire County Court and his Officers!" He drained the glass at a gulp and refilled it. "Jonathan, will you be good enough to take these two glasses with my compliments to the gentlemen whom you will find in the

kitchen?" He turned to Arthur gaily: "An amusing *contretemps*. Through some quaint misunderstanding a distraint has been levied—I believe that is the correct jargon—and we have two bailiffs in the house. Two honest, decent fellows they appear to me. There is no reason why we should make them feel awkward. Poor Lavinia"—he patted her cheek—"was a little distressed by their arrival. This is the first time that an incident of this kind has happened at Chadshill. It struck me that it was our bounden duty to celebrate it. The only thing I have to apologise for is the cold mutton. If only I had known! Our visitors rather took me by surprise. I'm afraid that the champagne may be a thought too dry for them. I hope they didn't complain, Jonathan? What did they say about it?"

"They drank it," said Jonathan, who had just returned. "They didn't say anything."

"No doubt they are used to it," said Mr. Dakers, with a humorous wink. "But to return to our mutton," he rattled on, "has it ever struck any of you that the proverbial 'cold shoulder' which I have offered these gentlemen is a slanderous and misleading trope? England is the only country in the world that feeds mutton fit to eat; and English mutton, at its best, like this, is pure ambrosia. It was English mutton—or rather the wool that grows on it—which gave to England the era of prosperity that produced the Elizabethan Drama, the Cotswold Manor-houses. It was mutton—nothing less!—

that bred the romantic history of the Border, in which the Dacres, if I may be permitted to say so, played no small part. '*The mountain sheep are sweeter, but the valley sheep are fatter,*' " he quoted. "Now where does that come from, Jonathan? You're fond of poetry."

He filled his glass; the level of the wine in the magnum was sinking rapidly, and Mr. Dakers' spirits were rising in proportion. They went on rising all through that ghastly festival—ghastly because, even though the wine was a little in all of their heads, they were conscious all the time of Mrs. Dakers' tragic mask at the foot of the table. Jonathan, above all, was deeply, bitterly conscious of it; he had never looked so miserable in his life; but Mr. Dakers, and Harold, who was too young to realize what had happened, kept up a stream of forced high-pitched levity all the evening. Each moment Mr. Dakers became more exalted, boastful, flamboyant. He even began to talk about the d'Acre pedigree. When dinner was over he insisted that they should make a night of it, compelling poor Mrs. Dakers to recite the soliloquy of Bathsheba in *David*, beating time, with a nervous foot, to the maddening regularity of its iambic stresses. To complete the evening, with a malicious smile, he begged Jonathan to recite the invocation to Sabrina from *Comus*. The scorn with which he made the request gave to the *amende* the flavour of an insult. Arthur wondered how Jonathan would take it.

He need not have wondered. Jonathan took it like the gentleman that he was. Seriously, in that deep voice

whose beauty was the only thing superficially beautiful about him, he began once more the lines that he had spoken in the boat at Arley. Nor did Mr. Dakers stop him at *Leucothea's lovely hands*. As Jonathan, crouched in his corner, went on speaking, it seemed as if that beauty which is the essence of reality had invaded and permeated the fantastic scene. That real voice, speaking real words, was like pure light revealing the essential falseness of its circumstances; the littered dining-table, the sham conviviality, the echoed emptiness of Mr. Dakers' monologue; yet so pure, so overwhelming was it in its simplicity that all these falsities seemed somehow of no account. It made all things seem suddenly beautiful: Harold's fair profile, Greek against the lamplight; Mr. Dakers, a little maudlin, yet obviously moved, sitting with bowed head; Mrs. Dakers, erect, a statue of Niobe with unfeigned tears in her eyes. Jonathan's voice sank lower to the last cadence:

*Mortals, that would follow me,  
Love virtue; she alone is free,  
She can teach ye how to climb,  
Higher than the sphery chime,  
Or, if Virtue feeble were,  
Heaven itself would stoop to her.*

He stopped, Mrs. Dakers rose majestically; she went over to Jonathan and kissed his forehead. None of them had ever known her to do a thing like that before. Harold looked up and smiled at Arthur with his violet

eyes, big and almost black in shadow. Mr. Dakers rose and knocked out his pipe. All the flamboyance had been melted out of him. His wiry figure looked shrunk, old, pathetic. For all his falseness the man loved beauty, in his way.

"Thank you, Jonathan," he said. "We are indebted to you."

Jonathan, without another word, began to clear the table.

As Arthur whizzed downhill on his bicycle into Halesby that night, his mind seemed charged to breaking-point with a strange excitement. The day that he had spent with the Dakers was intense with drama: it compassed so many and such various emotions. In one whirl he remembered their physical battle with the Folly Rapid; the languor of their reedy backwater; the moment of Jonathan's rebellion; his father's glance of hatred; then Mrs. Dakers' theatrical welcome; Mr. Dakers' clowning; the tragedy that lurked, off-stage, in the presence of the invisible bailiffs; Harold's boyish indifference; the tears that ran down Mrs. Dakers' cheeks; the silent kiss that she had planted on Jonathan's forehead; and, behind all, the deep melodious rumble of Jonathan's voice. They gave him, this flood of small dramatic reminiscences, a curious feeling of having been made part of a larger life. Out of their confusion of joys and suffering, of beauty and sordidness, of truth and falsehood, his brain, in which the fumes of alcohol still lingered, extracted an incoherent



fantastic dream of its own. It did not occur to him that one of the most important elements in human drama, that savage thing that is misnamed the tender passion, was lacking.

## CHAPTER V

### DUSTY DAMNED EXPERIENCE

MR. DAKERS' temporary misunderstanding with the Worcestershire County Court lasted for five days, during which, as all Halesby unfortunately knew, the bailiffs were "in." On the eve of a forced sale he managed, somehow or other, to make himself understood, though where he got the money from is past understanding. For a long time after this Mr. Dakers found himself navigating very troubled waters; and just as Jonathan had jumped overboard and pulled the skiff upstream when they found themselves stuck in the Folly Rapid on Severn, so now it was Jonathan who, quite unconsciously, towed Mr. Dakers into safety. In other words that legacy, which a prudent uncle, who knew his brother-in-law, had tied up so that it only matured when the stress of educational expenses was at its worst, became available, and Mr. Dakers, nothing daunted by his late distresses, set sail at once with crowded canvas.

The proceeds of the legacy were to be devoted, according to the testator's dispositions, to Jonathan's education, and expended at the discretion of the trustee (Mr. Dakers) until Jonathan came of age. Mr. Dakers used his discretion—if not indiscreetly, at least in a wide

sense of the word. Jonathan's education, thanks to his scholarship, was, more or less, looking after itself. The thing most important to Jonathan's welfare, at the moment, was that his surroundings should be worthy of his means. It was important, to begin with, that his family should not carry the stigma of debt: so Mr. Dakers paid all his creditors. It was important also that he should not feel ashamed of his relatives' standard of life: so Harold's allowance at Harrow was increased; Mrs. Dakers was provided with a new, but still traditional wardrobe; Mr. Dakers replenished his cellar handsomely, presented a new pavilion to the Brimsley Cricket Club, erected a flagstaff at the Chads-hill gate, from which, on national anniversaries (Agin-court, Trafalgar, Waterloo, King Edward's and Mrs. Dakers' birthdays) he flew the Union Jack, and bought an English bull-dog which posed beneath it like a figure in a *Punch* cartoon. His own contribution to Jonathan's background was the publication, at Jonathan's expense, of a new volume of poems—*A Mercian Muse*, dedicated *To my Wife*.

It would be rash to say that these changed circumstances had much effect on Jonathan. The fact remains that, during his next year at hospital, he began, in the words of Halesby, to "break out." Of course he had more money in his pocket (though not so much as Harold) to break out on. The more probable explanation is that the natural and very vehement passions that slumbered within him had been released by that moment

of inspired ruthlessness on the river in which he had shattered the family conventions by saying, for the first time in public, exactly what he thought about his father's verses. The drops that trickled through that tiny breach in the barriers of shyness and repression which contained his soul were the forerunners of a huge, turbulent flood. In one short day Jonathan had become himself. And Jonathan's self, so sedulously hidden heretofore, was something to be reckoned with.

Physically, of course, he had always been potentially alarming. There was no guessing at the force that lay pent up within his ungainly limbs. Mentally, people might have known that there was far more in him than appeared on the surface, though shyness forbade him to reveal anything but what was dragged out of him. Now, suddenly made confident, this uncouth lad, whose exterior had always seemed pathetic if not grotesque, became a commanding figure among the men of his year. This revolution was not a matter of externals. He still remained as inelegant as ever in his rough clothes and tousled hair, clumping down the stony College corridors in the same hobnailed boots with which he tramped the lanes and commons by Chadshill. His sudden expansion, his amplification, was a phenomenon of the spirit; it carried with it a spacious suggestion of adventure; he became, in fact, a symbol of freedom, of rebellion, and was, accordingly, popular.

The curious thing was that he hadn't sought popu-

larity. He had rarely spoken to anybody; but now everybody was anxious to speak to him; and when he answered them they fell beneath the spell of his deep, rumbling voice, the charm of his ugly smile. From being a recluse, he became the most sociable of creatures, his social talent being all the more charming because it was so unexpected.

Particularly to women. By this time he and Arthur Martock were "dressing" together in the surgical wards of the Prince's Hospital; in the hearts of the probationers Jonathan made a stir. All those young men were moved by this new proximity of variously desirable femininity, and most of them were generally on or over the brink of little furtive affairs, shy assignations and secret cups of cocoa in the ward-kitchens at night, tentative contacts of hands that met momentarily over the sordid business of surgical dressings. Most of them were young and desirous, and very self-conscious about it. But there was nothing self-conscious about the new Jonathan. He knew what he wanted; and probably got his kisses without subterfuge or scheming of any kind. He was so natural, so gentle, in spite of his roughness, so ready to do an unpleasant job without grumbling, that the most acidly jealous and spinsterly of sisters smiled on him and were ready to trust him with their probationary lambs. He seemed so safe; and that was why he was so dangerous. Unlike most of his comrades, he never spoke to others about his adventures. That was one of the reasons why they came to

him; but in spite of their frequency and variety it is doubtful if he was ever in love. On that subject he had his own, and very exalted ideas.

As soon as he had money to spend on them, he began to play games. That was the only part of Mr. Dakers' influence that had left its mark on him. He started by winning, in a blood-stained ring, the inter-University heavy-weight boxing championship. Unofficially, and with far greater bloodshed, he had fought and floored one of Astill's gigantic brewery dray-men, who had pursued his wife into the casualty-department at Prince's, smashed sixteen bottles, and blacked the Hospital Porter's eye. When the police arrived in response to a telephone message, they found Jonathan, with a cut lip, putting six silkworm-gut sutures into his opponent's eyebrow. Jonathan winked at the policeman, who had arrested him, drunk and disorderly, on the last student's Pantomime night and had since become a valued friend of his.

"At it again, Mr. Dakers?" said the policeman. "Do you want me to take this party in charge?"

"I guess he's had enough to be going on with, constable," Jonathan told him.

"By Gum, you'm right, gaffer!" the victim, now sober, agreed.

The new Jonathan didn't get drunk very often. And when he did get drunk, on preordained occasions, such as club-suppers and football "rags," he had the saving grace of never losing his temper, as he did, monstrously,

violently, on one or two provocative occasions, when he was sober. Usually, on such occasions, a woman was concerned. He never drank, as Mr. Dakers was beginning to do, secretly, systematically. For months on end Jonathan would touch no alcohol except the half pint of bitter which he drank with a crust of bread and cheese for lunch at Joey's bar (of blessed memory), or a glass of hot whisky and lemon on winter mornings. The general cast of his mind was too level for such excesses. It was out of strength, rather than out of weakness, that he drank when he chose to, and always in company with others. He knew, amongst other things, that he couldn't afford to do it; for, in spite of these human expansions, he was taking the profession of medicine as seriously as ever. Besides which, he was generally in strict training for football or boxing—for any sport except cricket, in which he could never hope to emulate the achievements of Harold, now, thanks to Jonathan's legacy, at Trinity, and well on the way to his Blue.

It was out of his football career—he was, literally, a tower of strength in the North Bromwich scrummage—that one of the most significant episodes of Jonathan's college-life arose. In his fourth year at North Bromwich he made one of a football team—the United Hospitals, or something like that, they called it—which was invited, towards the end of the season, to visit Paris and play one of the teams which was beginning to make Rugby Football popular in France. It was the first

time that Jonathan had ever been out of England. Mr. Dakers disapproved of the continent of Europe and all its works. If anyone mentioned the Alps or the Pyrenees or the châteaux of the Loire valley in his presence he would quote Charles Kingsley:

*While we find God's signet fresh on English ground,  
Why go gallivanting with the nations round?*

For Jonathan, however, a little weary of the gospel according to Eugene Dakers, this trip was an enormous adventure. He was surprised to find the rolling downland of the *Pas de Calais* not greatly different from the chalk country behind Dover; the blue-bloused porters on the quay at Boulogne only needed a change of clothes to turn them into honest Englishmen; the towers of Notre Dame seemed as satisfactorily Gothic as those of any real English Cathedral, and the French team, whom the United Hospitals beat on the field at Colombes, played a fast, open game, and took their licking surprisingly like English sportsmen.

After the match Jonathan had his first experience of Latin hospitality. The English team were entertained to dinner, an admirable dinner, in which the floridity of the speeches (King Edward had just visited Paris) was atoned for by the quantity and excellence of the wine. After dinner they were driven, in furious fiacres, to a theatre, half music-hall, half cabaret, in which Jonathan's knowledge of female anatomy, which had hitherto been limited to the wards and dissecting-room, was



surprisingly amplified. At first the spectacle was confusing, but increasing familiarity bred anything but contempt. The hospitality of the French team was so comprehensive as to include in its amenities the privilege of youthful female society; and by one o'clock in the morning Jonathan found himself on terms of amazing intimacy with a small but brilliant blonde named Madeleine whose single purpose in life was to prove that Latin hospitality had no limits.

In Montmartre, no doubt, this powerful, lumbering English innocent was an unusual type. These ladies, like any other human beings, have their fancies; and Jonathan, for the moment, was Madeleine's. She laughed, this lissome, delicate creature, at his clumsy French; but when she laughed, her teeth were white and shapely as a young wild animal's, and the eyes that smiled at him beneath their dark lashes were melting, kindly, and full of a curious, unprofessional interest. In that noisy, garish cabaret, she seemed a creature apart. She had no taste for the night-life of Paris, she said: to tell the truth it disgusted her. She was country-born, she told him; her heart ached for the green fields, the blossom, the lilacs and the *coquelicots* of summer. She leaned closer to him and whispered in a French which, even if he couldn't always understand it, seemed finer and more delicate in its precision than any human speech, though he was a little disconcerted, and doubtful of the compliment, when she called him her "big wolf." At last, at a point when it seemed as though delicious

languor could go no further, she became suddenly practical.

"I am tired, my friend," she said. "Let us go!"

They went. Jonathan had no clear idea where they were going; but as soon as they reached the *Place Pigalle* Madeleine hailed a cabman in a frilled pelisse and gave him her directions. In the shadow of the cab's hood she crept close, submissively, to Jonathan. "Put out your arm," she said, "that is not comfortable. Ah, that is better!" and she nestled cosily within it. The cab jolted slowly over the cobbles of dark streets, lengths of bright boulevard, shadowed by the bare branches of wind-tossed plane-trees. All through the drive Madeleine lay passive and silent in his arms; the jolting of the cab thrust her delicately scented softness against him. Jonathan, with the whirl of noise and lights and all the strangeness of the day's adventures throbbing through his mind, felt that he had never known a creature more gentle, more childlike, nor yet more provocative. The softness of her powdered cheek lay against his; her blonde hair brushed his eyelids. Yet when, in a street more dark and sinister in its tall shadows than any other, she stopped the *fiacre* and disputed with the cabman over his fare, her languor disappeared; she became hard and practical.

"Give him two francs: not a *sou* more," she said. "These pigs are always ready to bleed a foreigner. It is a scandal."

Jonathan paid the cabman in a dream. He had half

thought of returning to the carabet in the same vehicle and rejoining his friends; his return-ticket itched in his waistcoat pocket. But Madeleine, as a matter of course, took his arm, and led him, while the cabman continued to revile her in incomprehensible dialect, to a dark doorway and the foot of a stone staircase where a wizened and dirty *concierge* handed her her key with an evil smile. If he could have found the words, Jonathan would have explained that he was merely seeing the lady home.

The turn of the staircase drowned them in stony darkness. Up, up, they went; three flights—then four, each landing smelling staler than the last. Madeleine apologized. Paris rents were terrible; all life was growing more expensive every day. "This is my palace," she said, leaving his arm to turn a big key in the lock. "Wait till I give you a light."

The lucifer sputtered with a smell of sulphur; a fish-tail gas-jet made a melancholy, hissing flare. Jonathan saw a tiny room, twelve feet by ten. More than half of it was occupied by a double bed, with enormous pillows and a balloon of a *duvet* covered in pink sateen. Over the head of the bed hung the picture, in a heavy gilt frame, of some religious personage, whom Jonathan wrongly took to be the Madonna, and a dusty sheaf of palms. On the mantelpiece were four photographs: an elderly couple, the man in a fisherman's frock, the woman with a queer head-dress; a smiling theatrical lady in tights; Pope Leo XIII, and a fat baby. The

room, in spite of its narrowness, was neat and, as far as the light showed, specklessly clean.

"My palace," Madeleine repeated, with a gay smile. Then suddenly, surprisingly, reached up and kissed Jonathan's lips. "How hot it is!" she said and proceeded to remove her blouse. "Do take your coat off!"

In hospital Jonathan had watched this procedure in cold blood a thousand times. Here, in the solitude of that fourth-floor room, the effect was entirely different. As he saw the silky sheen of those white shoulders emerging, he trembled; his head swam. Without a shadow of awkwardness Madeleine continued her evening toilet. Jonathan had a feeling that he should apologize for his presence, but it seemed that she was not embarrassed. She went on chattering as she undressed, as naturally, as shamelessly as a child.

"My picture gallery!" She pointed to the oleograph above the bed. "That is my patron saint, Marie Madeleine. Those are my grandfather and grandmother; it was taken at the pardon of Saint Cadoc at Sizun, when I was a child; that is my friend Yvonne, at the *Folies Bergère*; that is the Holy Father; and that is my baby, my little Yves." She snatched the portrait and kissed it passionately. "Isn't he sweet? I dream of him all the time. He is with my sister at Morlaix. Do you think he is like me?"

She posed, childishly, meekly, for Jonathan to see. "Yes, he is like you," Jonathan recklessly agreed. The idea of Madeleine as a married woman confused him.

Do what he would, he could not keep his bashful eyes off her. She dropped her pose, and laughed, and curled up like a kitten on the *duvet*.

"Why do you stand there like that?" she said, with a queer, low laugh. "Come over here, my child, what is the matter with you?"

He obeyed heavily. She patted his cheek, and kissed him again. "How funny you are!" she said. "I know. You have a headache. It is that champagne of Jules's. Close your eyes, and I will stroke your forehead."

They lay together on the bed. Jonathan, with closed eyes, felt her soft fingers passing through his hair; and all the time, beneath these gentle hypnotic movements, she went on whispering in that French that seemed, each word, so delicately, so finely chiselled. She was talking about her childhood in Brittany; of the cider-orchards, the rock-strewn valleys, the heathery hillsides; she talked to him, as if he were a child himself, of her childish companions; of the old fisherman, her grandfather, who sailed with the cod-fleet to Iceland; of her sister, who now looked after Yves; of the great pardon at Loc Ildut, on Corpus Christi, and the traditional costume the peasants wear for it. Then, suddenly, without any change of tone, she began to talk about Paris; about the cabaret at which Jonathan had met her, and her quarrels with the other girls that frequented it. Then, finally, about men.

The French, although she could understand them better, she really did not like. They were too experi-

enced, they took too much for granted; they had strange ideas. The Spaniards—particularly those from South America—were just pigs. Italians, rather better, and often very handsome. The English and Americans were best of all. They had a respect for women; they were gentle and generous. She had known an American boy from Chi-ca-go (was that it?) who was the image of Jonathan. That was a type that she preferred. She had said so to herself when she saw Jonathan that evening. Hadn't he guessed that she liked him? She thought she would like to live, *en ménage*, with an Englishman or an American. It was not necessary that he should be rich. That was her ambition; to live quietly and respectably in a little apartment of her own and do the cooking. She loved cooking. To make *tripes à la mode de Caen* with real Breton cider! Ah, it was a dream! But all the time, as Jonathan listened to that hypnotizing voice and felt the touch of those softly weaving fingers, his heart was growing colder and colder; the fire that had suffocated him died away in his body. His mind was in a whirl of pity and horror. At last the voice and the fingers stopped together.

"Now, are you better?" she said. "Open your eyes! Try!"

He opened his eyes. He saw her, more simple, more childlike, more gentle, more desirable than ever. But now he could not see her apart from that background of horror. His eyes showed it.

"What is the matter with you?" she repeated. "Tell

me! Ah . . .” her face hardened. “I see. You have changed your mind. You do not like me. Is that true?”

The question was ruthless. Jonathan answered truly. “I think you are more beautiful than anything I have ever seen. And I can’t bear it.” He went on, stammering. He was at pains to discover, delicately, what he couldn’t bear. His French was awful; but he had set himself to it. Her home. . . . All that part she had told him about Brittany. . . . He could see how she loved it. Her child, too. She spoke as though she were longing to see him again. It was devastating. Why should she go on living this terrible life in Paris? It had killed him even to hear of it. Why need she go on with it? Why shouldn’t she go back to the country that she loved?

She shook her head and smiled, with superior knowledge. Why? Because life had worked out differently. Could he picture her as a *bonne* in some farmhouse, with hard hands and no figure, tramping in to Morlaix once a month to see her Yves for half an hour? Up at five o’clock every morning—she stretched her body luxuriously—a slave, a drudge? There was such a thing as money in this world!

Jonathan became practical. Money. Just so. What was the fare to Sizun, to Morlaix, to wherever it was?

She told him. She had an excellent head for figures.

Very well, then. Jonathan fumbled in his pocket and produced gold. Madeleine’s eyes brightened. So much

for the fare. There remained a substantial sum; enough at any rate to keep her until something turned up. He emptied his purse; the return-ticket was providentially still in his waistcoat pocket. He offered it all to her. She took it with a wise, a pitiful smile. This was a kind of madness that ought to be encouraged.

"And now," he went on, in his execrable French, "you will promise me to go back to Sizun?"

She promised willingly. There was a queer smile of amusement lurking in the dark eyes. What was a promise, after all?

Jonathan rose from the bed triumphant. Never in all his life had he been so conscious of his own nobility. He was flushed, exultant. He began to put on his coat. The money had been surprising; this was incredible.

"But surely, my friend, you are not going?" she asked.

"Yes, I must at once."

She stared at him. "But it is now the middle of the night. Where are you going?"

"To the *Gare du Nord*. I shall wait for the boat-train in the morning."

"Five hours? It is ridiculous. You must sleep."

But Jonathan was not running any further risks. This moment of victory was the signal for retreat. She scanned him narrowly. Still, in the back of her mind, there lurked the suspicion of a slight to her attractions. For all his generosity, she felt a shade resentful; but there, on the bed beside her, lay the spilt gold. This



was a case of madness rather than depreciation. Such men were dangerous. Jonathan was already at the door.

At any rate she would not fail in the bare duties of hospitality. She slipped from the *duvet*, in her black stockings—went over to him and flung her white arms round his neck. To a celestial observer they must have presented a figure of comedy; Jonathan in his rough tweeds towering over this stockinged nymph. Madeleine was studiously polite, in spite of her unconventional attire or lack of it. Professionally, after all, she was in full dress. She bade him goodbye with the dignity of a duchess.

“You will not forget me?”

“I shall always remember you. In Brittany, perhaps. . . . You had better give me your address there. Or better. Write to me if ever you are in difficulties.”

Jonathan scribbled his own address—or rather that of the hospital—on the back of an envelope. She stuck it, carefully—she was always practical—in the frame of Leo XIII. Then, dutifully, as was her wont with all her clients, she kissed him. Jonathan was touched.

Down four dark flights of stairs he plunged precipitantly. The concierge was no longer in his box. The entrance smelt staler than ever. Hurriedly he let himself out into the deserted street. He had no idea, until he had questioned a reticent gendarme, where the *Gare du Nord* lay. An hour’s wandering brought him to the *Boulevard Magenta*, where market gardeners, driving in from the country, saw a wild, hatless figure striding

along and muttering to himself like a madman. But this was no madman. It was a prophet, inspired, cursing the city of Paris, and all its iniquity! It was a spurred knight, riding home from the vigil of chivalry; it was a sentimental boy, with a frustrate body and a spirit ardently triumphant. His companions, sleepy, ill-tempered, and rather the worse for wear, were amused to find that they had to lend Jonathan money for a cup of coffee. Old Jonathan had been 'on the bust' with a vengeance this time, more luck to him! For many months afterwards he waited anxiously at the Hospital for a letter with the Morlaix postmark which, naturally, never came.

## CHAPTER VI

## SILVER STREET

THE Parisian incident showed that Jonathan, in spite of his physical appearance and a certain balanced air of maturity which made him seem more 'grown up' than his contemporaries, was far younger in the ways of the world than most of them. The fact that he continued up till the last year of his hospital life to live out in the country at Chadshill preserved in him a kind of rustic innocence of which few were aware. On the surface he appeared no more ingenuous than his companions whose sophistication was a matter of personal pride; he never seemed, in any sense of the word, a prude; there is no reason to suppose that he avoided, on principle or by inclination, the usual indulgences of student life, that he was anything, in short, but normal. But in spite of his reputation for bold lawlessness and mighty appetites, the fact remains that, when he turned his back upon the city, he generally retired to the chaste company of his hills and of Mrs. Dakers.

No ordinary acquaintance of his could have gauged the depth and breadth of Jonathan's attachment to his mother. Mrs. Dakers, apart from the picturesque rôle that her husband had assigned to her and her theatrical

elocation, was an extremely stupid woman, who, having abandoned in early life the task of understanding Mr. Dakers, had resigned herself to understanding nothing and nobody. Certainly she never remotely understood, nor attempted to understand her elder son. But Jonathan adored her without reservation. From earliest boyhood he had constituted himself her slave; an adjutant in all those domestic offices in which, to do her justice, she excelled; a mainstay in all the labours that taxed her strength; a perfect corrective, in household matters, for her romantic husband's deficiencies. He was the man-of-all-work whose handiness dealt with everyday emergencies beyond her strength; his quick brain straightened the tangles of her domestic finance; his foresight shielded her from the arrows of Mr. Dakers' intellectual scorn. And Mrs. Dakers took it all for granted. She gave him nothing in return; absolutely nothing beyond the reward of an automatic, conventional embrace. He knew that he might just as well have made a confidante of a stone; and she, on her side, never dreamed of admitting him to her confidences—partly no doubt, out of loyalty to Mr. Dakers, round whom they must all have centred; partly because his devotion was so constant, so unobtrusive that she was as little aware of it as of the oxygen in the atmosphere. Luckily for Jonathan he had energies to spare; otherwise the huge absorbent inertia of this woman would have sucked him dry. All the ambitions and enthusiasms which she had adopted, like every other

emotion of hers, from Mr. Dakers, were concentrated on the past the present and the future of Harold. It never seemed to occur to her or to either of the others that but for Jonathan the amenities of Chadshill (and of Cambridge) would not have existed.

But though his mother absorbed the bulk of his available affection, it is not to be supposed that Jonathan was never in love. Indeed, he was seldom out of it. His generous and sentimental heart was possessed, to common knowledge, by a series of sirens with any one of whom, as far as they were concerned, he might have made a disastrous marriage. There was Sister Cronshaw, in Number Three Theatre at the Infirmary, dark-haired and classic featured, to whose perfections the white severity of a sterilized gown and head-dress gave an effect of chlamys and fillet that was purely Greek. Her beauty was as chaste and as sterile as the theatre-robcs she wore; her fingers as lovely as Leucothea's when stripped of their rubber gloves—were as precise, and delicate in their precision, as the glittering forceps that they handled. Students who entered that theatre fell, like Circe's swine, beneath her fascination; her beauty made her scornful, as all had reason to know; no influence less potent than that of an Honorary Surgeon could soften her dark eyes. And yet, within a week, she had fallen (in a limited sense of the word) to Jonathan!

The affair with Sister Cronshaw was spread over a month which included diversions so little Greek as boxes

of chocolates and stalls at a music-hall; the Nurses' Home grew murmurous with excited whispers; Jonathan became the cynosure of its two hundred eyes. Then, just as suddenly, the matter ended. Jonathan, shamefully, was to blame. He had suffered, it seemed, a sudden revulsion of feeling at Sister Cronshaw's perfectly legitimate familiarity with anatomy, which was as Greek as it could be, in the theatre. This secret was divulged by Sister Cronshaw herself. She said that she had been mistaken in Jonathan; he had a coarse mind.

Then there was a girl undergraduate, straight out of Princess Ida, who had fallen in love with Jonathan's torso on the football field. Jonathan at her suggestion took her on the river and quoted poetry, which wasn't what she had expected of him. She had been reading Nietzsche and Whitman; anticipated a superman, and found an æsthete. She, too, was mistaken in Jonathan; his mind was not coarse enough.

There followed an episode far more serious than these, the outcome of the annual Saturnalia of the Students' Pantomime night. Jonathan, as a member of the organizing committee, had access to the back of the theatre. She was a slim, blonde dancing-girl, one of a troupe of seven, an English version of the forgotten Madeleine. For a week or two after that wild night he lost his head. The hospital knew him no more. It, and everything else, went by the board. He returned, an older and—paradoxically—a chastened

Jonathan; and settled down to work, like grim death, for his final examination.

It was time that he did work. Of late his energies had been dissipated into so many channels. When later, in June, the examination came on, he passed—not brilliantly as a son of Eugene Dakers and the holder of a scholarship should have done, but by the skin of his teeth. Mr. Dakers, however, was not openly offended. Jonathan, after all, was not his strong suit; and the fact that Jonathan was now a qualified doctor and in a position to earn his own living, would liberate the remains of his legacy for use in more profitable directions. On the strength of this freedom Mr. Dakers snapped up a bargain in old cognac and a cabinet of Coronas, levelled and relaid the pitch of the Brimsley Cricket Club, started a miniature Rifle-range, bought a new Encyclopædia Britannica, and presented his old one to the Halesby Conservative Club. He also went, alone, on a sea-trip to the Norwegian Fjords, in order that he might correct in suitable solitude, the proofs of his new tragedy; *Kenelm the Martyr* (privately printed; copies from the author, ten shillings and sixpence, post-free) which was dedicated: *To my Son*.

The departure of his father to Norway gave a great relief, through Mrs. Dakers, to Jonathan. He had just realized his one and only ambition. However narrowly he had achieved it, he was now a doctor. No house-surgeon's post at either of the hospitals would be vacant until the Autumn; so he decided to relax, and

enjoy the long vacation in Harold's company at Chadshill.

It was the first real holiday he had taken in five years. Harold and he would have a great time together, renewing, in Mr. Dakers' absence, the careless raptures of those distant summers when they had been boys together, before their egregious father had been found out. Some cricket (for Harold's sake), some tennis, some days on the river, some long expeditions into the green brooklands west of Severn; and then, more precious than these, long evenings of quiet talk on the dim lawn or in the lamplight of the deserted study, where their mother, relieved of the uncertain anxieties of Mr. Dakers' presence, would sit and sew and listen with a smile on her lips to their lazy converse.

Of course it didn't work out a bit like that. Though Harold, by some fluke in which Mr. Dakers suspected jealousy, had missed his Blue, his cricket career absorbed him. There was some talk of his playing for Worcestershire that summer. A friend at Cambridge had booked him for several week-ends of cricket at Midland country-houses. Quite apart from his athletic prowess he was becoming a social success; he knew this, and was flattered by it. He also knew that poor old Jonathan, in spite of his many admirable qualities, would never be anything of the sort. Among the society that Harold now frequented Jonathan would be completely out of his element. In these rapid days people hadn't time to judge others by anything but externals, and poor



old Jonathan was—unfortunately—a creature whose idiosyncrasies needed explaining. It wasn't Harold's fault that most of his new friends lived at a distance from Chadshill and had little or nothing in common with their old life. In any case, he knew that he could count on Jonathan's understanding the difficulties of the situation and appreciating the reflected glory.

Jonathan understood. The reflected glory did, actually, give him pleasure. In spite of the difference of his own modest ambitions from Harold's, he sympathized; even though he could not share it he liked to think of Harold pursuing the brilliant course which Fate had decreed for him at birth.\*

Luckily, among Harold's new acquaintances, there was one family which had done Jonathan the honour of accepting him, on sight, at something more than his face value.

These were the Martyns of Silver Street. Alec Martyn, the only son, had latterly become friendly with Harold at Cambridge. His father, James Martyn, was agent for the Black-Country estates and guardian to the mineral royalties of the Marquess of Clun. Mrs. Martyn happened to be a cousin—as was nearly every well-bred person in the county of Galway—of Lord Clun's brother-in-law, Lord Halberton. When James Martyn found himself unpleasantly involved in the agrarian outrages of 'eighty-six, the Marquess had offered him this agency, and the Martyn family, packing up all their belongings, had established themselves in

one of the smaller Powys properties, Silver Street, a pleasant Queen Anne manor-house of red-brick that stood, gracious and forlorn, amid a grove of smoke-blackened elms, on the outskirts of Dulston.

The family's situation was somewhat incongruous. Mr. Martyn, through no fault of his own but rather from sheer tradition, was a snob. In the West of Ireland they had no middle-class; or at least, if such a class existed, it had been tacitly disregarded. At Dulston, unfortunately, there was no other. There wasn't for instance within all those miles of slaggy desolation, a soul who knew the leagues that separated the Martyns with a 'y' from the Martins with an 'i.' Southward, in Worcestershire, west of Severn, in Salop, there remained a number of families with recognizable names; but between them and the islanded gentility of the Martyns lay a zone as barren and arid as a black Sahara. So, rather than admit the existence of such negligible upstarts as the Willises and Hingstons, those princes of the new, industrial aristocracy, James Martyn shut himself up, appropriately, in his Queen Anne house and continued to live an Eighteenth Century life—in other words, the life of a Nineteenth Century gentleman in Ireland.

For Mrs. Martyn, who shared his prejudices in an exaggerated degree, and for himself, this was all very well; their very isolation was satisfying; but for Alec, Harold's Cambridge friend, and for his sisters, who remembered nothing of Ireland, life at Silver Street

was not entertaining. To them the irruption of the Dakers boys who fortunately had no visible connection with the industrial world, was a godsend. And to Jonathan, if not to Harold, the society of the Martyns opened a new world.

There were three Martyn girls. Sheila, the eldest, had been born in Ireland. Sheila was twenty-two, and already a woman of the world; which meant that she had visited Dublin twice in Horseshow Week, stayed, several times, with her cousins the Halbertons in Devon, and been presented at Court. She had, in fact, the makings of a great lady, with her mother's Norman profile and fine bearing, and more than a dash of the cold, thin Halberton blood. Honor, the second, looked anything but aristocratic; a dark girl, with a big, good-humoured mouth, strong limbs, ungainly, like those of a young colt, a loud laugh, a firm handclasp, and frank eyes of an incredibly deep blue. She, of them all, was her father's chosen companion, riding with him when he went to inspect the Cluns' outlying properties, shooting the young rooks that wheeled among the black-branched elms, walking up such partridges as had escaped the Dulston poachers' nets over sooty stubbles. She was now twenty-one, having been born in England in the year of the Irish trouble.

Edith, the youngest of the three, was very different. Although she had been born at Silver Street and educated in England she remained, astonishingly, far more Irish than the others. Hers was the fineness of Sheila

warmed by a more generous blood; the vigorousness of Honor in a body instinct with grace; the dull-gold hair of Sheila with Honor's violet eyes. In aspects of repose she had her mother's dignity without her mother's well-bred lifelessness. One moment she was an authentic Halberton; the next, impulsively, the negation of everything for which the Halbertons stood. Her beauty was as clear, as vivid, as elusive, as incalculable as that of of April sea; so changeable that there were times when you would have said that she was not beautiful at all, that she had nothing but the bloom and perfume of youth. Yet not even in these moments of doubt could you have denied that she was alive. When the Dakers first came to Silver Street she was seventeen, and had just put her hair up.

Jonathan had already encountered Alec Martyn and taken to him (as everyone did) on his one visit to Harold at Trinity. Alec was a refined and aristocratic version of the Stage Irishman, whom Bernard Shaw was at that moment engaged in destroying; in other words, apart from his politics, he had a good deal in common with Bernard Shaw. He was intelligent—perhaps more intelligent even than Harold, who was no fool. Like Harold, he had charm; but his charm depended less than Harold's on the possession of a handsome person. The physical part of him was pleasing rather than beautiful; his mind that of a brilliant opportunist. Deficient in humour (a Halberton failing) he had more than Harold's share of wit. He would have made, one

felt, and did make, an excellent soldier. At the moment his principal accomplishments were a brogue, a bowling average of twelve, and unexceptionable manners. These last were in the family tradition. His father and his uncles had been known in Ireland as "the polite Martyns."

It was Alec's manners, more than anything else about him, that embarrassed Jonathan. Harold was reasonably well equipped in that direction; but Jonathan had none to speak of—no more than God and Mrs. Dakers had given him. Not realizing the asset of his own simplicity, he found the Martyns—particularly Sheila and her parents—intimidating. The grand manner, which was so natural to them, so easily aped by Harold, froze his blood.

In social usage the Martyns were curiously formal. Indoors, and with strangers, they seemed to take colour from their surroundings; the sober elegance of the drawing-room at Silver Street, so choicely proportioned; the Aubusson carpet; the Chippendale furniture, with its lucent patina, the oval-framed Reynolds portrait of Mrs. Martyn's great-grandfather (a Hewish of Roscarna) above the Adam mantel; the fluted Queen Anne silver from which Mrs. Martyn poured out China tea. The atmosphere of that drawing-room and the people inside it had an unapproachable dignity and a far more unapproachable ease. It was critical, yet so civilized in a material, Augustan fashion that Jonathan knew that its tacit criticism would never, in any circumstances,

become offensive. Even if his roughness provoked amusement, he was certain that the amusement would be well-bred.

On that first afternoon he suffered, none the less, from an overwhelming sense of his own stupidity and uncouthness. It would have been easier if James Martyn and his wife had not been quite so polite, singling out himself, rather than Harold—who was chatting with Alec and Sheila—as the object of their attentions. Heaven knows how it would have ended, if Honor, seeing his sufferings, had not tactfully come to the rescue and side-tracked him into a discussion upon the proper breaking of setters and retrievers. A jolly, generous girl she seemed to Jonathan; in body a little more like himself, and therefore less physically attractive than her sister, and free, when she chose to be so, from the others' devastating good-breeding.

Not only Honor was aware of Jonathan's distress. Out of a silence which became her, as the youngest, Edith, ineffably cool and fragrant in shadow, watched both his floundering and Honor's gallant rescue with a humorous intentness in her grave eyes. Her interest was so potent, even from a distance, that Jonathan became unconsciously aware of it. In the midst of a sentence he faltered. His eyes, suddenly lifted, met Edith's eyes, and divined, in an instant, the amusement that he was providing. He stopped dead, and blushed to the roots of his hair. Once more, with heroic good-nature, Honor intervened; but it was fury for that

detestable mischievous little minx in the corner, so cool, so self-contained, that made him, suddenly, become himself, and gave him confidence to damn the lot of them. When once he had gracefully escaped from Silver Street, he decided, Harold could keep his Martyns and be welcome to them.

Yet, curiously, when tea was over, when Mr. Martyn had retired to his office, when the Irish butler had brought in Mrs. Martyn's card-table and patience-packs (patience after tea; after dinner, piquet with her husband) and when Alec had swept the others out into the open air, Jonathan realized that the Martyn girls indoors and the Martyn girls outside were entirely different persons. In the space of two minutes they skipped forward two centuries; these fine young ladies of the eighteenth century became, abruptly, tomboys of the twentieth.

Before this, Honor was the only one who had shown signs of being human. Now Sheila shed her fine manners like a court-dress, and Edith, that secret, exquisite minx, became a laughing child. They played double tennis in series. Jonathan sat out first with Sheila, and found her as easy as even Honor had been. But though she accepted him it was clear that she did so because of Harold; her eyes followed Harold all the time, and, when she spoke to Jonathan it was of him.

"What awful bad luck," she said, "that your brother has missed his Blue! He's such a wonderful all-rounder; so keen in the field. He has such strokes, too!

Two years ago I saw him batting at Lord's when Alec played for Eton, you know. Of course you must have been there. Why didn't we meet you? He sat with us part of the time. Ah, yes—I'd forgotten you were at Winchester, weren't you? You must have been there with my cousin, George Lapton, Lord Halberton's son. George is a rotten cricketer."

Jonathan confessed to his own black Alma Mater. Sheila was nonplussed. For her there were only three schools in England, Eton, Harrow, Winchester, and a place called Wellington that soldiers sometimes, unaccountably, came from.

"But what did you *do* in North Bromwich?" she enquired, speaking as if the City of Iron were a thousand rather than ten miles away. Jonathan laughed. He was on the point of admitting that he had played Rugby football to some purpose, when the set ended, and Alec in his Eton blazer came toward them and swept him off into another. Honor hurried away with long strides to feed her Labrador puppies; Alec, a pale blue figure, perched near the net to umpire; Sheila, to her obvious and glowing satisfaction, got Harold for a partner, and Jonathan found himself blessed with the enigmatic Edith.

For the moment there was nothing enigmatic about her. The delicate, humorously contemplative figure of the drawing-room had vanished. In its place he found a business-like creature with blouse-sleeves of ivory silk rolled up over white arms, seriously determined to win.



Her quickness, her alert concentration amazed him. She moved on her toes, like a dancer; like something betwixt earth and air, like her own swift, low, underhand service that barely cleared the net. A floating thistle-down, a skimming swallow; incredibly light. Sheila had a tennis style—she had style in everything. Yet Edie (as everyone, including Harold, called her) was dowered by nature with a grace that matched Harold's own. Into whatever flight or contortion the movements of the fast game precipitated her, her body, of itself, was live and lovely. And, what was more, Jonathan, watching her, knew that she was unconscious of it. She was unconscious of him, too; of everything, indeed, but the flying ball.

They lost the first game, Sheila's service; the second, Edie's. The third, with Harold serving like the swoop of a peregrine, was a foregone conclusion. Edith's mouth became set with seriousness. "Bad work, partner," she said. She was quite impersonal; he was not Jonathan or Dr. Dakers, he was just "partner." It seemed a pity . . . In serving, fortunately, Jonathan's great height helped him. He knew that, on his day, Harold could not stand up to him. And this day was Jonathan's. Instinctively he diminished his violence in serving to Sheila.

"Whatever are you doing, partner?" Edie whispered anxiously. "For heaven's sake plug them in at her, it won't hurt her. We've *got* to win. They don't spare *us*, you know."

He followed her instructions; drove Sheila off the court. Sheila shook her head at Harold: "I can't . . . I simply can't." Edie glowed beside Jonathan; he could almost feel the warmth of her. "Splendid . . . oh, splendid! That's the stuff, partner!" They had won the game. "*Three—one!*" Alec called.

"Now we're beginning," she said, or rather she said "beginnung": the softest, most gentle of brogues inflected the last syllable. She gathered the balls for her own service so deftly, so cleanly, that Jonathan had not time to stoop to pick them up: "You look after Harold," she said; "I know dear Sheila. When you return to her, play on her back hand. That's her weakness." Jonathan played on Sheila's back-hand. Soon Alec at the net was calling out: "Five all!"

In the next game Edie and Jonathan seemed to be inspired, and all the inspiration, it seemed to Jonathan, came from that vivid child. Harold was serving, as fast and ruthlessly as ever. It was delicious to see Edie, with her grim little mouth, standing back to meet the hurricane. Somehow or other she managed to get them over the net, and then the first danger was past. Jonathan was at his best. "Oh, partner," she cried. "You're playing like an angel!" Fighting each point to the dead ball they played the game to *deuce*. "Sheila's getting rattled. Good luck to her!" Edie whispered softly. Sheila was rattled. She hated being beaten by anyone. There was an air of petulance in her whispered excuses and reproaches. Harold smiled at both; his hardened

nerves were not to be disturbed by things of that kind. Yet, trying to kill a ball of Jonathan's, he missed it altogether; and then, after one smashing net ball which Edie, as grim as ever, returned to him, served two double faults. He swung his racket. "Curse it! Oh, sorry, sorry, Miss Martyn!" he cried.

Sheila smiled. She thanked him, and looked as though she could have killed him. Edie smiled too, on Jonathan. "Thank you, partner!" Suddenly her eyes dazzled him. He was blinded; could see nothing else. She gathered the balls from the net and the boundaries like a ball-boy. In her subdued triumph there was a friendliness that moved Jonathan. He thought her smile was the most lovely thing on earth.

But after that, as luck (or Alec) would have it, they never played again as partners. It was good luck, Jonathan decided, because now he was able to watch her enchanting movements without distraction. He sat on a deck-chair while Honor told him all about the Labradors; Sheila, eager to forget the flavour of defeat, had taken possession of Harold again.

"If only you doctors would find a cure for distemper," Honor was saying.

Jonathan scarcely heard her. His eyes, his brain, his whole sentient being was engrossed in that vivid fragment of life which was Edie, playing, with her back to the wall, by Alec's side. The movement of her body enthralled him; it was her body that he saw, her clothes were part of it and of her spirit too. Body and clothes

and spirit; all three were mingled in something coloured like ivory, too unsubstantial for flesh. He sought for figures to describe her and could not find them. Ridiculous! She was only a strange child.

"It begins in the eyes," Honor explained to him. She was speaking, of course, of a different kind of distemper; but Jonathan, aware of her unconscious appropriateness, burst out in a laugh that was anything but appropriate to her story of dead puppies. He apologized: "I'm so sorry, Miss Martyn. Something funny struck me. Do go on! It begins in the eyes?"

"Then the poor darlings begin to snuffle. Just like a human being with influenza. It's too, too, pitiful! If only you wretched doctors . . ."

She was only a child? She was not a child at all. She was ageless. Nor was she strange, but marvellously familiar; another incarnation of that particular physical type—blonde hair and skin fine-textured; silk, cream and ivory—which he had glimpsed already twice—once on a fourth-floor in Montmartre, once behind the scenes of a North Bromwich theatre—and which, mysteriously, had been destined to trouble him from the moment when the plasm of his germ-cell first came to life until the day of his death. Yet those earlier glimpses, troubling though they had been, were not to be compared with this. In Edie, unconscious still of his scrutiny, the pure abstraction was clothed in flesh as pure. Within that fragile, translucent vessel was contained the fulfilment of his every aspiration and desire. She was a synthesis

of all the beauty he had ever known or desired; beauty of remembered music and chanted words; beauty of aspiring thought, high deeds, triumphant stone; beauty of leaping fire and fluent waters; spring woodlands, sailing clouds; thunders and silences. He knew it; he was shaken; his heart throbbed within him, with exultation, with dread. She had come at last! In all his life there would be no other woman! "I sat up all night with them," Honor sadly told him. "I could do nothing but what the vet said: give them a little milk with cognac in it, and a teaspoonful of Brand's essence now and then . . . "

Jonathan appeared to be listening attentively. He found himself murmuring something technical about a stimulating expectorant. Honor's frank and undeniably beautiful eyes still earnestly asked for information; but while he answered her, to the best of his ability, Jonathan reflected how miraculous it was that Honor, who was so much more friendly than Edie and possibly, for all he knew, a finer character, had not the power to move him, while at the least tremor of an eyelid or stirring of a finger, Edie could make his heart beat and his head swim. There was something in this that transcended reason. So much the better; he had been the slave of reason too long.

The light was fading. At this hour, in September, the elms of that high plateau grew dim with mist. The players' voices, Edie's included, pierced the still air in a curious clarity. Even her voice, with its faint Irish-

ness, seemed the unique expression in sound of all desire, stirring him through his ears, even as her figure flitting moth-like over the dewy lawn moved him through his eyes. Her voice, clear, reedy, like a bird's singing in that hush which is the dusk of sound, pierced to his heart more keenly than any bird-song. At Chadshill, as a boy, with Keats in his mind, he had stolen down lanes ghostly with moonlit hawthorn-ivory to the edge of Uffmoor Wood, to listen for nightingales. Even so, in this later dusk, he listened for Edie's voice, and hearing, his heart melted into a warmer rapture.

The long set finished. They walked away from the court and the dim background of elms toward the house. Edie strolled by his side; a soft, white presence. She spoke, in her low voice, confidentially:

"It wasn't nearly such a jolly set as ours."

If he had dared, he would have asked her why, hoping, against hope, for an unimaginable confession. He could say nothing; her presence made him dumb. He only knew that a wonder had fallen on the lawns, the house, their moving figures, on everything. A verse of poetry wandered into his mind:

*Roses that down the alleys shine afar,  
And open, jasmine-muffled lattices,  
And groups under the dreaming garden-trees,  
And the full moon, and the white evening-star.*

It moved his lips, like the waft of a dying breeze. She must have heard his murmur.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. Some lines of Matthew Arnold."

"Poetry?"

Evidently the idea was foreign to her. What did that matter? Why should she care for Poetry? He laughed; she did not pursue the question. She stooped, her body bent in a lovely bow, and touched the sword with her fingers. "What a heavy dew! That means Autumn," she said. "Oh, how I adore Autumn!" And Jonathan, dreaming by her side under the darkening sky, had a feeling that this moment had been singled out of the welter of life as something separate and cool and exquisite, different from all evenings that had ever preceded it in quietude and contentment and the gay, flowerlike perfume of youth. They were all young together, happy, immortal. No thought for the morrow. And Time, obedient to some divine benevolence, standing still.

It was over. They hung, in a little group, on the rolled gravel in front of the house, unwilling to part. It was over. The tempest that had swept through Jonathan's heart had not so much as ruffled the surface of Edie's mind. Was that to be wondered at? No word, not a single word of any significance had been spoken. Nothing was left for them now but an exchange of polite farewells, or perhaps the hint of another, distant invitation. Why hadn't he been able to prove that he wasn't really the uncouth boor that he seemed? Why hadn't he managed to reveal those unsuspected graces?

He trembled in anticipation of the moment when he should touch Edie's hand; that cool hand, of an ivory whiteness, which, earlier in the day, he had clasped without a tremor.

But Sheila—Heaven reward her!—was not inclined to let Harold go so easily. It was late, she said; they were many miles away from Chadshill; why, after all, shouldn't the Dakers stay to dinner? "Of course," she explained, "you'll have to take pot-luck . . ."

"In flannels?" Harold protested. Harold was so damnably punctilious about trifles. As if a man didn't actually look better in flannels than in anything else! Jonathan was thankful, at any rate, that he was in his.

"You've no idea," Sheila was saying, "how informal we Irish people are. Make Alec give you a bath, while we girls dress."

Salvation! Half an hour later they were waiting with Mr. Martyn for the ladies in the dark panelled hall. The fabled Martyn politeness was excelling itself in Mr. Martyn's hospitality. As befitting his male audience he talked politics—not, of course, Irish politics: since Gladstone's betrayal had driven him from Ireland those were a closed book. A cousin of his who had been associated with Parnell was never mentioned in the family; it was just as if he "done time" for some offence against public decency. No, Mr. Martyn's present incubus was Lloyd George, and the monstrous Education Bill which the Lords—more luck to them!—had just



thrown out. Jonathan, who, just because Mr. Dakers was a Primrose Leaguer, had adopted Radical ideas, was silent. To please Mr. Martyn he would have sacrificed the whole structure of British Democracy.

"England," Mr. Martyn declared, "will soon become as uninhabitable as Ireland. These Old Age Pensions! Subsidizing idleness! What nobody seems to realize is that when once you stop old people working you kill 'um. The Lords, bad cess to 'um, passed the Pensions Bill. Clun and Halberton both voted for it. Clun, of all people! Why, if this petty-fogging Welsh attorney gets on to mineral royalties—as he will—half of Clun's income and all my job'll be gone! You'll see us emigrating to Canada or South Africa."

And Jonathan had a vision of Edie being snatched away from him: a pitiful white figure waving goodbye from the deck of an emigrant ship. He cursed Lloyd George in his heart.

At dinner he found himself on Mrs. Martyn's right. Mrs. Martyn, who knew that he was the elder, would never make a mistake in precedence; it made big dinner parties as fascinating as a game of patience. Sheila sat next to him; Alec beyond her. Edie, who came down late, in a pretty flurry, was at the other end of the table on her father's right. Mrs. Martyn immediately began to talk Pomfrets and Cluns—not because she was snobbish, but because, just as her husband's conversation was limited to sport and politics, so hers was limited to people, and these were the only people in the district

whom she knew. Jonathan was lucky enough to remember Lord Arthur Powys, whom he happened to have met, with his niece, Dorothy Powys, at Mawne. They didn't get very far on Lord Arthur. They couldn't; for all the time, over the cut-glass glacier of the dinner-table, Jonathan's eyes were on Edie.

She was dressed, that evening, in a frock of ivory satin, high-waisted and cut low. Unlike Sheila and Honor she wore no necklace, so that one could scarcely say where her pale skin ended and the frock began. To Jonathan she was all one gleaming wonder: a white flower, a madonna lily, with stamens of dull gold. She ate and drank with the heartiness of a young animal which made her exquisiteness a thought more human. Not once, during all that meal, did their eyes meet. Indeed, almost before he had eaten anything himself, dinner was over. He found himself stranded in a desert of port and politics.

But later, when they had formally joined the ladies and the elder Martyns had begun their ritual of piquet, Sheila, as hostess, proposed that they should dance in the hall. She wanted, clearly enough, to dance with Harold. Alec, among his other accomplishments, could pound out waltzes with a rhythm that atoned for a somewhat sketchy bass.

"Do be a darling, Alec!" she entreated, and Alec, who liked nothing better, sat down at the Broadwood grand which had accompanied the Martyns in all their wanderings.

Harold and Sheila were off and away at once; they had danced together before, at Cambridge in May Week. Jonathan knew that a malicious fate had conspired with Sheila to present him with the acme of opportunity and of humiliation at once. Since the days of Mrs. Willis's children's parties at Mawne he had not danced; he wasn't even sure that he could remember the steps. He realized, providentially, that Honor, the elder sister, must be the victim of his first experiment; but Honor, whose mind was still centred on her ailing puppies, excused herself, and before he knew what had happened, Edie was smiling in his arms.

Even if he had been a skilful dancer this sudden, intoxicating contact with Edie would have emptied his head. But Jonathan danced as he played Rugby football. He didn't hold Edie; he tackled her. The waltz, as he danced it, consisted of a manly rough and tumble in three-time which sent them spinning round the room like forwards in the loose. The pace, at any rate, was terrific. A chair went over. Jonathan, who had been holding his breath all the time, gasped apologies. Edie, looking him full in the eyes, burst out into uncontrollable laughter.

"I'm awfully sorry," he panted. "This isn't my game, you know."

She smiled and shook her head. "Oh dear, oh dear! It's quite magnificent, Jonathan, but it isn't dancing!" He blushed, more deeply than ever, at the sound of his name. Those lips so soft, so pure in their sweet line,

could turn even that grotesqueness into poetry. Her smile was serious: "Would you like me to give you a lesson?" He could not answer. "No? Then let's go into the garden. There isn't a breath of wind, and the moon will be up. Wait just a sec. I'll get a wrap for my shoulders."

Monstrous, that anything so lovely should be veiled. If he could have told her so! He couldn't. Too late, as usual. Swifter and softer than a cloud she was back again, a scarf of Irish lace thrown round her neck. She waited; she was waiting for his arm. So they stepped out together into the light of the harvest moon. Behind them six windows in the lower storey of Silver Street glowed like lantern-panes, throwing bars of gold upon the moonlit gravel: before them, an expanse of dewy lawns lost itself in a soft moon-shadow of tufted elms. As she clung to his arm, moved, as was Jonathan, by that sudden, fantastic revelation of beauty, she seemed less formidable—so little, so exquisite, so fragile. His great bulk overshadowed her, powerfully protective. Yet, when he hunted for words, her power made him dumb; and when she spoke, her calm voice clearing the veils of vague sentiment with which he was investing her, she was anything but childlike, and obviously not in need of his, or any other protection.

"However," she said, "did you dare to try and dance with me? You must have known that you couldn't. Tell me, what was it? Sheer heroism—or just politeness?"

He laughed. The frankness of his low laugh was always charming:

"I wanted to dance with you—it was just that," he said.

"Why ever should you want to dance with *me*?" she mocked him. "Why not with Sheila? Sheila's so very attractive."

"Not one ten thousandth part as attractive as you—to me."

"Really? How strange, Jonathan!" She spoke his name as though it were faintly humorous. "Harold finds her so."

Jonathan was silent. Why should they talk about Harold?

"And Sheila apparently," Edie went on, "thinks the same of him. Well, I don't blame her. Harold's extraordinarily handsome. He looks, perhaps, a little too good to be true. Is he really nice? You ought to know."

"Harold?" Such doubts had never been suggested before. Harold, in Jonathan's mind, was a creature apart.

"Yes . . . Harold. Why do you hesitate?"

"I don't. There's nobody in the world, in my mind, to compare with him."

"How queer! You're very different. Isn't he frightfully conceited? You mean he's really—how shall I put it?—sound?"

At once Jonathan was launched upon a flood of pane-

gyric. Harold's traditional divinity; his good-humour; his generosity; his kindness: in one inadequate word, his aristocracy.

"M'm . . . Aristocracy!" she repeated. "I know all about *that*. The Cluns and the Halbertons. Very dull."

"You yourself," he told her, growing bolder, "have something of the same quality."

"Dulness? No, no, of course I know what you mean. I'm sorry: I'm a heretic. I think it's just worth nothing. And Harold seems to me . . ." She hesitated: "Is it possible for him to be such a paragon on the surface and sound underneath?"

Jonathan could answer for that, passionately.

"You're frightfully loyal, aren't you?" she said.

He laughed. "Well, thank you for giving me credit for that virtue."

"I'm not at all sure it is one."

"Loyalty?"

"Sometimes it is only another way of saying stupidity."

He was puzzled. "It sounds," he said, "as if someone else, not you, were speaking."

"No, no." She shook her head. "It's me right enough. You see, I'm not loyal. Not to anyone, except, perhaps, myself. I try to be that. . . . Sometimes I'm not at all sure that I'm even capable of it."

"Ah, now you're pulling my leg!" he exclaimed. "I know better."

She shook her head again. "Divil a bit of it! I'm just being candid for once in a way. As one can be with strangers," she added disconcertingly. "To begin with, I'm not loyal to my family, in the way that you are to Harold. Shall I tell you about them? Listen: father and mother are just pure snobs—and rather stupid snobs. Honor is stupid too; but she's a darling, and not a snob in the least. Sheila's as hard as nails—as hard as I am. She rides dead straight for anything she wants. She wanted to get into Harold's arms to-night, and there he is, she's got him! As for myself . . . well, really, Jonathan . . . "

"You. . . you are utterly lovely!" Jonathan's deep voice trembled. "You're part of the moonlight. That's what I wanted to say: you're as white and lovely as that sailing moon!"

She turned her face towards him, smiling and pale. "But, my dear Jonathan, the moon has a dark side. Nobody has ever seen it—or mine . . . yet."

Deliberately, yet so skilfully that the movement seemed natural she detached her cool arm from his arm.

"Och, don't let's be talking about me," she said. "Tell me more about Harold."

In the ordinary way Jonathan would have asked for nothing better. At that moment he was wishing his dear brother somewhere else.

"There's nothing more to be said," he answered brusquely.

"No, no, we'd hardly begun," she persuaded him. "I'm longing to know everything. For Sheila's sake."

"Only for Sheila's?"

She laughed. "I'm interested too."

Her laugh, even more than her words, fell like a bar of shadow on his ecstasy. He felt she was playing with him now, and flatly refused.

"Another illusion gone . . . your loyalty!" she mocked him.

"But can't you see," he cried, "that the only person who interests me at this moment is you?"

She took his arm gently.

"And don't you realize, my dear child," she said, "that it's just waste of time? If you were speaking of Honor, now . . . " She began to tease him,

"I don't want to," he answered bluntly. "It's you who fascinate me. You know that quite well. Only you won't be serious."

"I'm frightfully serious."

"Only . . . " He struggled for words. "Only you keep deliberately denying yourself. You let me see nothing of yourself but the outside."

"I imagined," she suggested gently, "that that was what you liked. Something about the moon you said . . . What babies cry for."

"That's not what I mean." He began ponderously to explain. "I mean that you try to make yourself out something that you simply can't be."

She laughed. "All women do that. Of course, you



haven't had much experience of them. Anyone who has danced with you could tell at once that you weren't what mother calls 'a lady's man.' While Harold—distinctly—is. However," she added, "you're a lot more honest than him . . . or me."

"Not honest!" he fumed. "Are you saying these things just to make me contradict them?" He was puzzled and angry. "Why do you persist in laughing at everything?"

"Because. . . . Because, I suppose, most things are rather a joke. Let us walk. It's cold standing here. You can smell Autumn already. Chrysanthemums. And don't let us talk any more about people," she continued, as they moved away; "let's talk of things. Things are more interesting. Tell me about your work. You've just become a doctor, haven't you? Well, that must be one of the most exciting things in the world."

Her persuasions seduced him into talking of his ambitions. Two more years in hospital, as house-surgeon and house-physician. Then, consultant surgery. The wife of a successful specialist, he told himself, had a position at which not even the Martyns could sniff. Success of that kind implied affluence. Thus, while he talked of everything else, his mind ran on ahead. He enlarged on his enthusiasm for research. But now her interest flagged. Suddenly she burst in, apropos of nothing:

"What was that poetry you were mumbling on the lawn?"

He told her: "Matthew Arnold." He quoted the lines. His voice was made for the speaking of poetry. "Didn't they catch that moment, and aren't they beautiful?" he asked her.

It was a matter of the utmost importance to him that they should see beauty with the same eyes. She hesitated: "Yes," she said at last. "In a way they are beautiful." She let him down lightly. "Your ideas of beauty and mine are entirely different," she told him. "You see," she explained, "we belong to different ages. Father's century is the eighteenth; yours is the nineteenth; and mine . . . God knows what mine is!"

He laughed. "You're just a child!"

"You've been wanting to say that for a long time, haven't you?" she said. He could not honestly deny it; but did so, all the same. She shook her head sadly:

"No, no, you're romantic. You were born so, and I doubt if it's curable. This moonlight isn't good for you. Let's go indoors."

There was certainly nothing romantic about their parting that night. As he and Harold cycled back to Chadshill over the monstrous depression in which, before the coming of the ice-age, the slime of tropical forests had stiffened into the coals that now smouldered and flickered at them from innumerable spoil-banks, Jonathan's mind alternately flared and smouldered with them. He wanted, above all things, to talk about Edie, to hear the sound of her name on his own lips. Yet, for the first time in his life he felt that he could not confide

in Harold. He approached the subject dishonestly, by way of Sheila.

"You seemed to get on thundering well with her, Hal," he said. "As a matter of fact she's a damned attractive girl. You and she looked extraordinarily well dancing together."

Harold laughed softly. "Sheila? Of course, she knows that she's a beauty. Too much of one for me, I'm afraid. You'd need to be a millionaire to go in for jewellery of that kind. As a matter of fact the little one's more interesting. You two disappeared for such a long time that we thought you were lost. What did you make of her?"

"Not much." He evaded the question. Even if he had wanted to do so he couldn't have answered it. He found it vaguely disquieting that Harold considered Edie more interesting than Sheila. Of course it was unthinkable that he should ever be jealous of Harold. And yet . . . And yet he would have been happier if Harold's enthusiasm for Sheila had been more whole-hearted.

That night he could not sleep. The moon and thoughts of Edie kept him awake. It was in the moonlight that he pictured her. Her gleaming whiteness and the moon's were confused in his mind. The thing that babies cry for, she had told him. Diana . . . the chaste huntress—swift, white, unattainable. Actæon, clumsy lad, torn by his own desires. There was another boy, Endymion, to whom that sailing, heavenly whiteness

had stooped. Keats? Would she smile at Keats as she had smiled at Arnold? She had shown herself scornful of his poetry . . . and why not? What need had she of poetry, who was, herself, all poetry?

Next morning, with a half-bitter amusement, Jonathan looked at the verses that he had scribbled on the fly-leaf of Osler's *System of Medicine* at his bedside. He read:

*Beneath my lips her eyes fluttered like birds  
That are caught in a fowler's net. O, sweet birds, cease  
Your fluttering—for mine is a kiss of peace  
And I weave no strands to snare you save these words.*

Ridiculous! Of course he had not kissed her—probably would never kiss her. Yet, wherever he went, the memory of those imaginary kisses haunted him. Jonathan was in love; for the first time, utterly and fatally in love. And fate, as he might have expected, was ironical. He who had looked forward to this holiday alone with Harold as the prime reward of a gruelling summer's work, was now impatient and distracted in Harold's presence. He had no thought for anything in the world that was not connected in some way with Edie; he had no joy in life, but the secret joy of longing unsatisfied, till he should see her eyes and hear her voice again. In the meantime he deserted Harold to visit his tailor in North Bromwich.

## CHAPTER VII

### EDIE

FORTUNATELY—or unfortunately—for Jonathan, he had not long to wait. The Martyns, in their isolation, were eager for any company of their own age; and, during the rest of September, Harold and he went often to Silver Street. They danced, played cards and tennis; they even practised cricket at the nets; for the Martyn girls were hard and plucky enough for any imaginable sport. Honor and her father went cubbing with the Albrighton, while Sheila, Edie and the Dakers snatched the brief joys of an Indian Summer in picnics to the Wyre Forest and the Shropshire hills. Mr. Dakers, his proofs impressively corrected in the presence of his fellow tourists, returned, with a number of sonnets about Norway, to Chadshill.

He was there to receive the Martyns when they came over to tea. Jonathan had never seen him in better form. He did the English Country Gentleman with Artistic Leanings to perfection, and astonished Jonathan by a novel prolongation backwards of the Dakers family tree. In this new version King Richard's Eugene d'Acre ceased to be its founder. The original d'Acres had come (like Mr. Dakers himself) from Norway. They had been chiefs of one of the Norse marauding bands that

had settled in Normandy in the ninth century and formed the aristocratic backbone of the Norman feudal state. One branch of the family had established itself in Sicily; another had followed the Conqueror to England and fought at Hastings. Mrs. Dakers, if she were pressed, would recite a scene from the little tragedy—the adjective was modest—that he had written on the subject. Mrs. Dakers yielded to less pressure than might have been anticipated; and Jonathan, watching Edie's face, as he did continually, almost died of shame. After that Mr. Dakers gave them all a lecture on Silver Street. The house had been built, he said, on the site of a Roman Station. The name signified The Wood (*silva*) on the Road (*stratum*) just as Cold Harbour, his friend Mr. Furnival's place, meant the Farm by the Trees. He had no doubt that if he rode over to Silver Street one day he would be able to show them traces of its Roman origin. The Martyns did not rise to this suggestion.

But though he suffered torments from his father's affectations at Chadshill, Jonathan's visits to Silver Street were full of a bitter-sweet ecstasy. Whatever Harold might have thought originally of Sheila, she made no secret of her feelings for him. They were quite definitely, possessive. As Edie had said, she always knew what she wanted and generally got it; and Jonathan was grateful for her persistence.

Each time he met Edie he fell deeper and more desperately in love. The verses which he had scribbled

on the flyleaf of Osler's *Medicine* were the first trickle of a spate. Though better than his father's, they were not very good. He knew this, and showed them to nobody, least of all to Edie; but the writing of them gave some vent to his tumultuous heart.

Those verses circled back eternally, like tired birds, on memories of that first night. Tired yet homeless; for though he saw her frequently, the sense of peculiar intimacy which had coloured his first rapture was never quite renewed. Edie was as exquisite and cool as ever; more exquisite indeed, but also, alas, more cool. Her frankness was so skilfully, so devastatingly employed against him that every romantic word which flowered within his brain wilted on his lips. Her humour had power to make his exaltations seem ridiculous. It wasn't her aristocracy (they still played with that word) that disarmed him; it was her honesty. To his first picture of her, as a wayward, lovely child, and to his second—and equally inaccurate—image of her as a creature mysteriously, provocative romantic, she opposed a ruthlessly realistic portrait of herself as she was, or, at any rate, as she imagined herself to be: a candid creature of the new age, self-sufficient, self-contained, and wholly destitute of romantic illusions; a healthy, humorous mind, in a body that was not only equally healthy but brilliantly attractive; an impulsive, generous soul, impatient of her present surroundings, accepting Jonathan's company for want of anything better, and his adoration because she couldn't avoid it.

"Oh, Jonathan dear," she would say; "why, *why* are you always trying to make love to me?"

"Because I can't help it," he answered bluntly. "You know that I would die for you."

"How sweet of you! But really there's no immediate necessity for that."

She always laughed at his ardours, yet on another plane did him the honour—for which he was humbly thankful—of confiding to him her inmost impatiences and desires. He ached to find that she was unhappy at Silver Street; between her and the rest of the family (Honor excepted—though Honor scarcely counted) there was no love lost. She was not only the youngest, and therefore, until Sheila was married, unimportant, but also something of a freak—a throw-back, as she said, to some wild, discreditable strain in the Martyn's pedigree. Their conventions, their social standards irked her to a point at which she could no longer see the humour of them. She had been born, an iconoclast, into a strict sect of idolators; and while, for Jonathan's delectation, she destroyed their idols, her vehemence shattered the pedestals of many that he had lovingly erected in his own heart's secrecy. He had fondly imagined himself to be a rebel; in comparison with Edie he found himself conservative. This brilliant, lovely creature had attained a freedom far beyond his.

Sometimes, indeed, her sudden, penetrating ruthlessness scared him; there seemed in it so little of the



humanity that should have matched her beauty; at others, it possessed the validity of a revelation but always, whether she frightened or inspired him, he was enslaved by the compelling loveliness that was the unique, authentic complement of his own desire. Even when she cast him blindly into hell, that inferno was paradise compared with any other experience. He had a mystical conviction that this child, this woman, was the one creature on earth whom, in this life, he must always and irrevocably adore.

The precious moments dwindled precipitately; in a few weeks, in a few days, Alec and Harold would be going back to Trinity, and the post for which Jonathan had applied at the Prince's Hospital would fall vacant. "As soon as they've gone," he told her, "I shall see no more of you. I'm perfectly aware that I'm only invited to Silver Street as a sort of appendage to Harold. Apart from him your people have no use for me."

"I don't think they're passionately enraptured with you, Jonathan," she admitted.

"Well, there you are!" He was like a sulky school-boy. "That means I shall probably never see you again. And you won't miss me, either. That's the devil of it!"

She smiled. "You know I shall miss you dreadfully, Jonathan dear."

"If you only meant it!" he cried. He knew that she meant it, though not, alas, in the sense that he desired.

She looked at him in silence. Her eyes were gentle, full of a pitiful kindness which, he knew, was as much

as he could hope for. She began to humour him, speaking as she might have spoken to a petulant child.

"If you look as tragic as that," she said, "you'll make me cry."

She looked, at that moment, as if she were speaking literal truth; her eyes were bright with unusual tenderness. She took his hand:

"Oh, Jonathan, Jonathan . . . " But the syllables of his name always brought into her voice a tinge of humour as though, in themselves, they were faintly ridiculous. He wished to God that his father had given him a less comic designation.

"No, no," she continued, "it won't be as bad as all that. Listen, I'll tell you a secret."

This was her secret. For a long time she had been fretting against the stultification of life at Silver Street. "You realize, dear child," she told him, "that I am odd man out. Sheila and Honor are different; they're perfectly contented. Honor has her dogs—God bless them!—and Sheila has her young men. You may be quite sure that when Harold has gone she'll find some other. She has a nose for them. And I, of course, haven't."

"Thank heaven for that!" Jonathan murmured. She laughed, and went on: "You're after being too previous, Jonathan darling. Someday I'll be falling in love; and then, I warn you, there'll be the divil to pay! But now, praise be! I'm not in love with anyone, unless it's myself. Be quiet now, and listen to me; this is serious.

Last night I had the whole thing out with himself. Father's a backwoodsman—it's an awful pity he's not in the House of Lords; but it just so happens that he's rather fond of me. Mother isn't, really. Of course, you realize that. Sheila's her white-headed girl; the true-blue Halberton. I told him, last night, that I wanted to earn my living. He took it badly, poor dear. It's a ghastly discredit in an unmarried Martyn—very nearly as bad as having a baby. Don't look so shocked, Jonathan: things like that do happen. Besides, you're a doctor. . . .

“And then, you see,” she went on, “there's the money side of it. It's far cheaper to keep us on ice, so to speak, till we're married than let us go. Clun's a mean devil, and scared to death of these new land valuations, so father is, honestly, dreadfully short of money. I told him that he'd have to look on it as an investment. I only want enough to pay my college fees for three years; if I stayed at home I should be a burden for six or seven, waiting about for someone to condescend to marry me. Besides, even if I had to humiliate the family by borrowing from somebody—I think Lord Arthur, who's a sportsman, would help me—I was absolutely determined not to stay at home. You know what our life is, Jonathan dear, how *could* I?

“And so,” she continued with a business-like air, “to cut the matter short, I showed him the papers . . . What? Didn't I tell you? How stupid of me! I'd written, on my own, to the Marbourne Physical Train-

ing College: Ling System, Swedish Gymnastics: massage, remedial movements, games, and all that sort of thing. It wasn't a bit of good my thinking of Newnham or Somerville. I'm not intellectual, Jonathan—just barely intelligent. Whatever I express comes through my body, not through my mind. Besides, though I'm little, I'm strong and active—you could give me a medical certificate for that, couldn't you?—and pretty good at games. So that if I have to earn my living, as I mean to, this Swedish business seemed exactly the thing. Don't you agree?" Jonathan hesitated. "You don't? Well, what's against it?"

"They're pretty awful, those Marbourne young women," he answered dubiously. "I've seen them. Vegetarians: anti-everything. They used to come into the University for a course in Anatomy and Physiology. They're not your kind."

"My dear child, you've no idea what my kind is. *I'm* anti-everything. Or, at any rate, anti-everything at Silver Street. However, I'm going there, and that's the end of it."

"You mean that everything's settled?"

"Settled? Heavens, no! There'll be a campaign with several pitched battles; one with mother, another with the Halbertons. But you needn't worry. I shall get there just the same. I'm going, Jonathan, I give you my word for it. And then, perhaps," she added persuasively, "you will be able to call for me at Marbourne and take me out to tea—like you do the nurses,"

Jonathan blushed, and knew that she had seen his blushes. It was the first time that she had ever alluded to his hospital adventures. They were done with; she might decently have left them alone. In spite of the inducements of further friendship that she offered him, he had an instinctive distrust of this new plan. It seemed, in some indefinite way, a threat to Edie's fineness. Her proper setting, however deeply she resented it, was Silver Street: wide lawns, encircling elms, and Queen Anne silver. At Marbourne that exquisite bloom of ancient graciousness would suffer.

"You want, most of all, to get away from Silver Street?" he asked her.

"That's the first step," she agreed.

"Then why not marry me, Edie?"

"Oh, Jonathan, Jonathan . . . "

"God knows I love you. You know it. I have a little money. I can earn my living to-morrow. Edie, why not?"

"Because, my dear child, I'm not in love with you. Not in the very least. You, of all people, should respect my Victorian idealism."

"As usual, you're laughing at me," he complained bitterly. "Just when I'm realistic. That is the most reasonable way of cutting loose, if that's what you're after."

"It isn't, my dear; it's only a hundredth part of it—it's only a symbol of dozens of other things."

"Edie, I worship you. If you could trust me, I believe I could make you happy."

She laughed softly, and then, as though to soften the laugh, took his hand: "Forgive me, Jonathan darling, that sounded like a speech out of Ouida. I suppose everybody talks in clichés when they're in love. Of course you love me; you've mentioned it several times; but just at this moment it isn't love I'm wanting."

"What *do* you want, Edie?"

"God knows, Jonathan."

She turned and looked him full in the eyes. Her own had never been more lovely than at that moment. He knew she was sorry for him, and wished to Heaven she wasn't.

"We're so awfully different, Jonathan," she said. "That's why we're such good friends. You're six years older than me . . ."

"Six years?" he was indignantly protesting.

"Be patient! Listen to me! Of course I know six years is nothing in itself. It just depends where those years come—I know it sounds stupid; I can't explain. I mean . . . I mean that a child born in the year of the French Revolution would be quite different from a child born, say, ten years later. It isn't what people are taught; it's something in the air they breathe. The *Zeitgeist*—anything you like to call it. And you—I've told you all this before, you know—you definitely, somehow, belong to the last century—don't be indignant!—while I belong to this. When we look at the same thing we see it from a different angle. . . ."

"Rot," said Jonathan. "There's nothing that you think with which I can't sympathise."

"Ah, sympathise, yes. But you can't *feel* the same. I'm awfully sorry, darling, but there it is! If you want an example: Harold belongs to my generation, you do not. Don't think, like a Victorian hero, that you can 'mould' me to your heart's desire."

"You are all my heart's desire," he told her passionately.

She shook her head slowly; his words were unanswerable.

"I think," said Jonathan heavily, "we'd better say goodbye."

The suggestion genuinely troubled her:

"Oh, Jonathan, what is the difference? I wish I'd never told you. I thought you'd understand."

Her panic put him thoroughly in the wrong; it made his renunciation, which had struck him as nobly spoken, look like sheer desertion.

"I should miss you dreadfully, Jonathan," she said. "I'd hoped we should see a lot of each other: I'd looked forward . . . " She stopped, as though she couldn't trust herself further.

"Edie," he said, "you know I'm absolutely yours. Whether you change or don't change, I shall be the same."

For answer, she took his hand and lightly kissed it. It was a sweet and terrible moment for Jonathan.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PRINCE'S

IN October when Chadshill and the Clents were at their loveliest, when Autumn woods smelt most sweetly, when hedgerows decked with hips and haws as gay as sealing-wax glistened at dawn with the rime of the first frosts—in October, when fogs, rising from sodden earth, caught, as in a foul filter, the sooty exhalations of smoke-stacks and furnaces, then spread them between North Bromwich and the sky, Jonathan began his term of duty as house-surgeon at the Prince's Hospital.

It was his first extended experience of city life. His country-bred mind would have rebelled against such cramped living had he not been absorbed in the consuming interest of his new work and in his passion for Edie. Edie, as she had foreseen, had won her battles, and was now established at Marbourne on the city's outskirts, three miles from the hospital gates. She was nearer to Jonathan, and more remote from him, than she had ever been; and her nearness coloured and subtly sweetened his unconscious life.

His chief was that brilliant, wayward genius, Lloyd Moore, the Don Quixote of Midland surgery. Already, in middle life, Lloyd Moore had become a legend: not



only in North Bromwich, where his daring fingers, his matchless clinical intuition, his rich humanity, his swift Rabelaisian wit had placed him in a category apart, but among all the towns and villages of the Mercian Plain—from Clee to Edgehill, from Charnwood to the Forest of Dean. The presence of the surgeon's frail, boyish figure, with its high-pitched toneless voice screaming incredible profanities, its red beard framing a face whose pallor resembled that of an agonized Christ, was an inspiration in itself; and Jonathan, with his somewhat ingenuous faculty for hero-worship, became, immediately, a devotee.

Lloyd Moore worked three times harder and faster than any of his colleagues, and expected his house-surgeon to keep pace with him. He had a vivid and sombre imagination, shadowed by the prophetic conviction (unfulfilled) that he himself would die of cancer. For him, who lived in the odour of blood and chloroform and antiseptics, the world was a stricken field. He rode through it with pennons flying, invincibly gallant, industrious, inspiring. Surgery, for him, was not a career, not even a vocation; it was a high romantic adventure, and the fire that flickered within that fragile vessel kindled the imaginations of all who followed him. Never, until he became Lloyd Moore's house-surgeon, had Jonathan fully known the splendours, the privileges of his calling; never before had he realized the pity, the tragic bravery of human kind.

In leisure moments he tried his hardest to become

the complete Philistine. This new life had no room for dreams, no place for poetry. The little respite that his chief's furious activities permitted him was devoted to the society of the other residents in a tired, but good-humoured atmosphere of small-talk, bridge, and medical shop. The "residents' room" of Jonathan's day was not particularly distinguished; not one of them strangely enough, has made much stir in the world; they were, in fact, a group of very young and very serious young men, extremely aware of the gravity of their newly-acquired responsibilities, full of enthusiasm, and conscious, in spite of the tiredness that resulted from their labours and the foul, sick air that they breathed, of the veneration of the female nursing-staff who shared these disabilities, and lived beside them in a conventual atmosphere of their own. From these, indeed, came the only admonitions of beauty that were vouchsafed them. In such an environment the Arts were discredited, if not absolutely tabooed.

Yet those days, and particularly that part of them which was spent in the communal dining-room, were happy for all of them, Jonathan included. If they were undistinguished, they were also, on the whole, homogeneous. Their interest were so narrowed that all could share them; their quarters so close that anything in the nature of dissension was avoided at all costs.

Besides Jonathan and Arthur Martock there was another denizen of Halesby; a queer lad named Ingleby, the local chemist's son, their senior by a year, who had

just returned from a voyage to the East as ship's surgeon. Then there was a loose-limbed Irishman, a Martin (with an "i") whose brogue, in poignant moments, reminded Jonathan of Edie's; his friend, and Martock's, Matthew Boyce, and a great hulking fellow named Brown (W. G. for short) who had lately married a nurse at the Infirmary; a harmonious company, deliberately, protectively sinking their idiosyncrasies in a common life that was as stereotyped as a hospital diet-sheet.

Of course there were wild and memorable nights in which, for a few hours, they all became students again; but Jonathan, in those days, was more seriously temperate than North Bromwich had ever known him. Of course, he was thinking of Edie. Once a week they met. Usually he took her for a ride on the top of the Tilton 'bus, that went jingling up the Halesby Road with its four horses—in those days only plutocrats like the Hingstons and the brewer, Sir Joseph Astill, ran to motor-cars—right up to the edge of the escarpment that looked down on Halesby and the Clents. Then they would go for long walks through those lanes, still inviolate, that spread a network round the quiet reservoir that had been built to hold the new Welsh water. Often they touched the edge of Jonathan's own haunts; but though they might easily have called for tea at Chadshill, they never went there; Chadshill and Edie belonged to different worlds, the world that was sacred to Edie might suffer by contact with that of Eugene Dakers.

Those country rambles, in which Edie's beauty was set against the natural background that he loved best, were precious to Jonathan. Although, by a tacit agreement, he no longer attempted to make love to her, her native physical perfection, tempered as it were by the Spartan discipline of Marbourne, made her beauty a weapon even keener and more piercing. Now, more than ever, she resembled the chaste huntress; a Tanagra Diana, exquisitely set free from the clay that bound her, so strong that she could easily outwalk him, so delicately fragile in her strength that, had she slipped, he could almost have carried her home. Not only her body but her mind seemed to thrive on freedom; its eager ruthlessness startled him; its swiftness left him floundering. And yet, for all that ruthlessness, she was kind. Now that she had accepted him as her friend—her only friend, she told him—she was ready to share in the pedestrian problems of his life. She invited his confidences, approved his ambitions—all but one. In a new, a delightful intimacy, she even took trouble to organize his atrocious clothes. They went shopping together; and Jonathan's get-up, for the time, was noticeably smart.

On the surface their relation was natural, friendly, entirely free from sentiment. Though Edie, being a woman, must have known and perhaps enjoyed the violence of Jonathan's repressions, she was easily able to pretend that they didn't exist. The fact that once, in the remote past, he had been in love with her—a boy

and girl affair, too foolish to mention—gave to their present mature relation of good comradeship a stability that it couldn't otherwise have had. The attack was over, she pretended, and Jonathan had acquired a protective immunity which enabled him to face the risk of further infection without fear. To demonstrate the completeness of that immunity she was prepared to provide the risks. No doubt she enjoyed the experiment. And so, in a bitter way, did Jonathan. At the bottom of his heart hope never wholly died.

In the middle of the next summer came a great occasion. The Cambridge cricket team came down to play the County at Alvaston; Harold and young Martyn were among its brightest stars. The season was one of relative freedom for Jonathan. Lloyd Moore was on his holiday, attending a surgical congress in Leipzig, and few urgent cases were being admitted to his wards. Harold was staying not at Chadshill, but with the Martyns at Silver Street; he and Alec and the family came in each morning from Dulston with another midland member of the Cambridge team, a boy named George Delahay, whose home was near the village of Lesswardine, on the upper waters of the Teme.

Jonathan went up eagerly to the County Ground on the first day after lunch. He was so proud of Harold that he had been telling all his out-patients about him. Harold had managed to get him a ticket for the members' pavilion. When the doorkeeper, an old professional, took it from him, Jonathan could hardly resist

proclaiming who his brother was. He was wearing one of the new, elegant suits that Edie had chosen for him, with a high, starched collar, and the latest thing in neckties.

The day, in its modified, North Bromwich way, was brilliant, reflecting his exalted mood; the very kind of day that he would have chosen for this particular triumph of Harold's, to which they had looked forward ever since they were boys. Bright sunlight flooded that great green oval bowl ringed by a thin black line of spectators and scattered with the gleaming flannels of the county team, the umpires in their long white coats, and two slim Cambridge batsmen at the wicket. From the tiers of the pavilion steps the whole scene looked bright and spacious; white tenting of the luncheon marquees, the dazzling whiteness of the score-board's moving figures, white cumulus sailing in a high sky, white pigeons wheeling, with the sun on their wings; and, in the foreground a brilliant medley of colour like a *pointilliste* picture—the gay confusion of women's summer frocks and parasols.

A glance at the score-sheet confirmed Jonathan's conviction that Harold was batting; even at a distance he recognized that lithe, beloved figure. The vast concourse of spectators sat strangely silent; Harold's bat flashed in the sunlight; a wooden click followed, while the ball, cut through the slips, went travelling to the boundary. As it reached it, a noise of clapping spread along the fringe of spectators like a crackle of flame.

The figures on the score-board moved rapidly. Harold had reached his fifty.

Jonathan's face flushed; tears started to his eyes; he began clapping himself, with his new chamois gloves, and dropped his programme into the lap of the man behind whom he was standing.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I'm awfully sorry!" he cried.

He was just on the point of explaining that the batsman was his brother when he discovered that the object of his apologies was Mr. Dakers.

"Hello, is that you Jonathan?"

They shook hands formally. It was several months since Jonathan had seen his father, though he might have taken it for granted that Mr. Dakers would be there. He looked, at that moment, seedy and insignificant. During the last year he had aged considerably. Though his grey, clipped moustache was as military as ever, the skin of his cheeks and nose seemed to be stretched above those bony protuberances, yellow, like the parchment of a bladder, and netted with dusky veins. The whole man, once so potent, seemed to have shrunk. He looked, indeed, less like an old English country gentleman than a commercial traveller or a solicitor's clerk; and the splendour of Jonathan's new clothes put his shabbiness to shame. His voice, however, was as rich and rolling as ever; he was obviously trembling with pride and excitement, but lonely—terribly lonely. It was pitiful to Jonathan to see how he clutched at the

chance of his company; disturbing, also to, realize that he had been drinking.

"Hal was a bit nervous to begin with," he explained in a voice laden with whisky: "He gave a bad chance at point in the fifth over off Santall's bowling. But now it really looks as if he'd got his eye in. He's scoring steadily all round the wicket. If he doesn't get too confident he'll make his century. A proud day for me, Jonathan! If Hal makes a hundred I shall die happy."

"You needn't put it in that way, pater," Jonathan told him.

"Well, well, I'm not so young as I was," said Mr. Dakers humbly. He smiled at Jonathan, and Jonathan saw that he had lately lost a tooth. The smile was intended to be friendly, but behind the friendliness, as always, it was grudging and scornful, and made Jonathan conscious of his new clothes.

"It's a long time since your mother and I have seen you, Jonathan." Mr. Dakers went on. "You look very prosperous. When, may I ask, are you going to honour Chadshill with your presence?"

"I hardly get a free moment in these days," Jonathan told him, truthfully.

Mr. Dakers gave a wry smile. As usual he had managed to make himself aggrieved, and put Jonathan in the wrong. Even when he pitied his father Jonathan disliked him. He wondered how he could retire gracefully without the appearance of unfilial ingratitude.

"I think," said Mr. Dakers, "you might consider



your mother." Jonathan flushed angrily. Never for one moment, in all their life, had Mr. Dakers considered her. The words were fantastic, like most others on his lips.

"I'll come next Sunday," Jonathan answered, shortly.

"That will be delightful," Mr. Dakers smoothly replied.

Burning with irritation, Jonathan left him. Already he had wasted a precious quarter of an hour that he might have spent with Edie. He was still flustered with anger and the constriction of that high starched collar when he discovered the Martyn party on the other side of the pavilion. Whatever else the Martyns might be, they were polite. With them he would not be subjected to sneering pin-pricks. They were there, all six of them. They welcomed him cheerfully. James Martyn, in a shabby grey lounge-suit, looked the *grand seigneur* that he was. Alec, who had not yet batted, was sitting in his pads by the side of his friend George Delahay, also in flannels; Mrs. Martyn, Sheila and Honor were dressed to the nines; while Edie, in contrast to her sisters, wore the navy-blue serge which was her College's unofficial uniform, a blouse of ivory Jap silk wide open at the neck and a broad-brimmed straw hat. When Jonathan appeared, she made room for him with a smile:

"How smart you are, Jonathan," she whispered. "You put us all in the shade. Harold is batting like a dream. Oh, well hit. . . . Well hit!"

The ball which should have gone for six, seemed to falter in the air, and descended, almost vertically, into the hands of one of the county fieldsmen on the boundary.

"Oh what a shame!" Edie was crying.

Harold was out for sixty-six. As he came running up the steps, with bat and finger-guards swinging, the whole pavilion rose to him with a tumult of clapping in which Jonathan joined. "The pater won't die happy after all," he was thinking.

Alec, who was next in, left them hurriedly. Sheila, who had been waiting her chance, immediately pounced on young Delahay. He was a handsome boy; in some ways more handsome than Harold. His people were friends of the Powyses; an old family, and wealthy. When Harold arrived, flushed and excited with his good innings, and ready to lay his triumph at Sheila's feet, he found the place next to her, which he had expected to occupy, filled by George Delahay. Jonathan could see a momentary flicker of disappointment in his fine eyes. Edie whispered to him!

"Move up, and talk to Honor. Let Harold come here!"

Harold came toward them: "Hello, old Jonathan!" He slapped him on the back. "My word, how smart you are!"

Edie laughed mischievously. It was just what she had said. Jonathan was horribly conscious that he had overdone it. For sheer physical reasons, he wished the

collar half an inch lower. As Harold sat down beside Edie, with a sigh of relief, he moved away, and talked to Honor. A dear, kind creature, Honor—but oh, the difference! As usual, her main preoccupation was dis-temper. Now that he was in hospital he ought to know all about it. And then she, too, must comment on his smartness! He answered her crossly, in a way that was unlike himself. He kept up a running, empty conversation; yet all the time, he was listening to Edie and Harold.

They were getting on famously. Why ever shouldn't they? Harold had all kinds of social talents to which he couldn't aspire. And yet it seemed to him that Harold was a little more than sociable. No doubt he was piqued by the pointed way in which Sheila, whom he had regarded as his special property, had turned him down; he was paying Sheila back in her own coin, more luck to him! But, as he listened, Jonathan felt that there was more than an affectation of enthusiasm in Harold's voice; his eyes were shining; his splendid body, which declared itself with a grace so natural through the silk cricket-shirt, seemed to radiate a force that was active rather than passive; his manner was easy, masterful, subtly possessive. And Edie was not the Edie that Jonathan knew. Her eyes shone now as they had never shone on him; her lips smiled, but not with the kindly, defensive humour which she gave him; her voice, that low, sweet voice, whose faint brogue ravished him, had tones in it that he had never heard

before, strange tones that chilled his heart. What was she saying? He could not hear for certain; and yet he felt sure that they were such words as she had never spoken to him, and that Harold was moved by them.

They were only behaving like this, he told himself again, to spite Sheila. If that were so, their energies were wasted. Sheila's cold brilliance was melting visibly for George Delahay's benefit. For the moment Harold had no more interest for her than that white-coated umpire signalling a bye from the wicket. Sheila always knew what she wanted, and rode straight for it.

" . . . just the colour of lions. Golden retrievers, they call them. You can only get them from this one place, somewhere near Banbury; Swaleford? Swale—something or other. Smaller than a Labrador. . . ."

They appeared to have forgotten, those two, that Alec was batting. Hadn't Edie come there, that afternoon, just to see her brother play? And there she was, with eyes for nobody but Harold, at the very moment when she should have been most attentive. She was bending over toward Harold; the wide brim of her hat threw a shadow over the base of her throat; the rounded edge of the right sterno-mastoid muscle in relief showed shadowed, dusky blooms of skin more silken, more delicate than anything in nature; lit by the slanting sun, that cut across them, her eyes glowed like violets—but not for Jonathan.

"Of course, they're frightfully expensive," Honor explained. . . .

It was impossible that either of them could know how he was being tortured; unthinkable, in any case, that he should be jealous of Harold and Edie: of the two people whom he loved most on earth. This grudging spirit was unworthy of him. What right had Edie ever given him to supervise her behaviour in this way? If it came to rights, he had no standing whatever. And why shouldn't Harold be charming to his best friend—Harold, who, unlike himself, was charming to all women? While Edie. . . .

"Bitches," said Honor, plaintively, "are much more moody. You can't make friends and be sure of them the way you can with dogs. . . ."

Jonathan gave a sudden laugh. She stared at him. He quickly apologized: something had just come into his mind, he told her. He had no excuse for being rude to Honor, poor dear! Yes, Harold was all things to all women; that was part of his talent. All through last summer, at Silver Street, he had taken no notice of Edie; he had never said a single word to show that he admired her. Hadn't he? Then came into Jonathan's mind a sudden memory of their ride home on the night of the harvest moon. "As a matter of fact the little one's more interesting," Harold was saying.

The recollection of these words threw Jonathan into a panic. He felt that he could stand no more of this. Suddenly, incontinently, he got up and left poor Honor stranded in the middle of a sentence.

"Why, surely you're not going yet?" she said.

He mumbled something about an appointment at the hospital, an urgent operation. As he passed behind her, Mrs. Martyn caught his eye and smiled at him:

"You're coming to talk to me, Dr. Dakers? How nice of you! It's months since we've seen you."

"The hospital . . . I'm awfully sorry . . . an urgent operation."

Now he could hear what Edie was saying to Harold. He caught: "How splendid of you!" God damn her and her flatteries! They were so engrossed in each other, she and Harold, that when he passed in front of them they were not even aware of him. He had to step across the barrier of Harold's long legs. "Excuse me!" he murmured.

Harold looked up: "Sorry, Sir. . . . Hello, is that you, old chap? I say, you aren't going already?"

As if they cared! For the third time he made his excuses. Edie smiled up at him, pretending—he knew it!—to be interested. She smiled at him with her lovely lips, not with her eyes. His love was skilled to interpret every change of expression in her face. He saw her eyes, that took no part in the lips' movement, and he saw Harold's. They were soft, bemused, yet shining; the eyes he thought of a girl and a boy in love.

As he left the pavilion a cheer rose from the crowd. Somebody was out. Perhaps Alec. What did it matter? Doggedly, without turning, Jonathan went on his way. In spite of the heat and the constriction of his high collar, he determined to cool his spirits by walking

back to hospital over a mile and a half of grilling asphalt.

Now that the first tumult of anger was past, a deadly depression lowered over him like a thundercloud. This misfortune was not merely incurable, it was reasonable, inevitable. He had not even a right to rebel against it. If Edie had ever dreamed of loving him, it would have been different. On the contrary, she had told him a hundred times that she didn't love him at all; her heart was as free as her swift mind, her exquisite body; and, being free, what in the world was more natural than that it should surrender to Harold, the male counterpart of her own perfections? What better fate could he wish for either of them than that they should love each other? And how could he, who loved them both, contest this happiness? Even if he succeeded in doing so, would he, himself, be happier?

Happiness! Personal happiness! That was the saltiest, the bitterest of life's mirages. Even now its imagined shapes dissolved before his eyes, leaving, in their stead, the vision of an ungainly mortal stumping in over the asphalt pavement of the Bristol Road with a bewildered heart, a high, starched collar and primrose-coloured gloves. Happiness? There was no such thing in human life. No man who was really conscious could ever be happy. It was only when they became unconscious—in sleep, in love, in religion, in the rapture of beholding beauty, in the absorption of strenuous thought or of physical exertion—that men could attain that negative

nescience to which they gave so positive a name. And whatever the means, the end was really the same. For himself, he had his work, a field of inexhaustible interest, full of enthralling mysteries that awaited the penetration of the human mind. There was no rapture in life, he told himself, to compare with the rewards of scientific research. So far he had never taken his profession seriously. From this moment, he told himself, he would begin to do so. The solution of his distress was easier than he had imagined.

But was it after all so easy? When he returned to the hospital he couldn't, at a moment's notice, settle down to his new life-work. To begin with, he was supposed to be off-duty. There, in his small bare bedroom, when he had discarded his new, uncomfortable clothes, he settled down to the contemplation of a bundle of case-sheets. There was nothing enthralling in records of medical commonplace. These dreary, sordid family histories might some day take their proper place in a significant discovery, just as a grain of coral, in blind depths, contributes to the structure of the emerging atoll. For the moment they were nothing but dull elements in a boring routine. They were not vital enough, these stale, dry details, to dispel from his mind the recurrent image of Edie's eyes, to make him forget the pain that gnawed at his heart.

There were other means of oblivion. He went to a cupboard, took out a bottle of whisky, and half filled his tumbler. He settled down again. Yes, that was



better. Thank God for alcohol! Let no man scorn, without pity, poor devils who drank! *Al-cohol—the* cohol the Arabs called it; and they were right. One drop of alcoholic seminal fluid, said Charcot primly, contained the whole family of nervous diseases. But Charcot, he could take his oath, had liked his glass of Bordeaux at dinner after a dragging day in the Salpêtrière. The value of alcohol as a drug had never been appreciated. The whole question was complicated by religious prejudices. Like chloroform. Hadn't the churches protested against Simpson's use of anæsthetics in midwifery? *In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children.* Pernicious nonsense! The subject would be a good one for a thesis. . . .

He looked at his watch, and realized that in another five minutes he would be on duty in the casualty department. Thank heaven for that! He pushed the case-papers aside, and hesitated before the problem of another drink. No . . . not just yet. The Casualty room was full of people who had sought unconsciousness in that way, and paid the penalty. *If the blind lead the blind.* . . . He smiled at his own joke. Well, well, it was good to know that he could smile at something.

A tap on the door. It had begun already. The porter was calling him.

"Mr. Dakers?"

"Yes, Joseph?"

"A casualty just come in, Sir, motor accident."

These motor-cars were the devil! There ought to be

some law against them. Dogs, chickens, children—they stopped for nothing.

"Right, Joseph," he told him, "I'll be down in a minute."

He put on a white jacket and brushed his hair. For a man who had suffered the biggest disappointment of his whole life, he didn't look so dusty after all.

He made his way downstairs to the Casualty department. The fumes of whisky still lightened and exalted his mind. The familiarity of his surroundings flattered and consoled him; here, more than anywhere else in the world, he felt really at home. The very stairs were familiar. He could go down them blindfold, drunk or sober. Just think of that! Even the out-patients' waiting-room, steeped in the smell of grimed and sweating humanity, seemed, in the dusk, a pleasant, spacious chamber. Work! There was nothing like work. That was the thing!

Inside the Casualty Reception Room a little group was gathered. He saw the broad blue backs of two policemen; a stretcher, from one of the Municipal Ambulances, lay on the floor; the Sister in charge of the Casualty Department was bending over it. The porter, Joseph, an old soldier, stood to attention. Jonathan, in his white jacket, was conscious of the fact that he, himself, was master of the situation, the authority on whose words all these people were waiting. He entered, with a confident smile.

"Good evening, sergeant. Another of these damned motor-cars?"

"A bad job, this time, I'm afraid Sir. I saw the accident myself. It wasn't the driver's fault. This fellow must have been tiddley." He lifted his elbow with an expressive gesture. "There was a big crowd coming away from the County Cricket Ground."

"The Cricket Ground? I was there myself this afternoon. By the way, sergeant, d'you happen to know the score?"

"Can't say I do, Sir. I only follow football."

"I asked you because my brother was playing."

"Is that a fact, Sir? Well, well," said the sergeant politely, "fancy that, now!"

"Come along then. Let's have a look at him," said Jonathan. "I suppose there's no doubt about it, sister?"

"Oh, no," the sister answered softly, "he was dead when they brought him in."

Jonathan leaned over beside her and lifted the ambulance blanket. He saw a high, bronzed forehead, caked with dust and blood. There, stiffly staring at the yellow ceiling, his thin lips set in a sardonic, contemptuous smile, lay all that was mortal of Eugene Dakers.

Jonathan drew his breath sharply. "My God!" he said.

He rose, and stood blankly staring at the pitiful spectacle, speechless.

"Caught him on the side of the head and carried him two yards," said the sergeant. "It must have been

instantaneous." He took out his notebook. "The ambulance is waiting, Sir. If you've no objection I'll go through his pockets. Then he can find out who he is and communicate with the relatives."

Jonathan still stood transfixed. He heard and did not hear. Suddenly, it seemed, they were all staring at him. His face was as pale and dusky as the smoked ceiling. By an enormous effort he pulled himself together.

"Don't worry, sergeant," he said. "I'll give you all particulars. This is my father."

"Oh, doctor!" The sister had suddenly burst into tears.

"Dear, dear," said the sergeant tactfully. "Well, well." He took off his helmet. It was a situation that would have embarrassed a Chief Constable. He turned to his subordinate; "You needn't wait, Perkins. Tell them at the station that I'll telephone later."

The sister was sobbing gently, on the floor.

"You needn't wait, either, sergeant," said Jonathan steadily.

"I'm sure it's very kind of you, Sir," the sergeant mumbled.

"The name is Eugene Dakers, Address: Chadshill, Halesby." "E.u.g.e.n.e.—Halesby," the sergeant repeated. "Very good, Sir. Then we shall need his age and occupation."

Jonathan hesitated. "I'm afraid I don't know his age. Say fifty-five."

"And occupation?" the sergeant kindly persisted.

"He was in business in North Bromwich. I suppose you'd call him a general agent." Jonathan explained as best he could. "I can let you know more exactly tomorrow."

"That's quite all right, Sir. I need hardly say"—he hesitated—"how sorry I am, Sir. I wouldn't have had this happen for anything," he added, superbly, as he retreated.

"Thank you very much, sergeant. You've been most considerate."

Someone touched Jonathan on the shoulder. He turned round, bewildered. It was his old friend, Arthur Martock, whom Joseph, the porter had hastily summoned when he realized what, in spite of the sergeant, had happened.

"Leave this to me, old fellow," Arthur was saying. "It's damned bad luck that you should have been on duty. Go right up to your room; I'll deal with everything. I can't say anything, but you know how I feel, don't you?"

He grasped Jonathan's hand. The sister, who for a moment had regained her professional composure, burst out crying again. Jonathan's own lips trembled. He could not speak; he could only grasp Arthur's hand. The muscles of his face were working spasmodically, beyond his control. To save himself, and them, from a pitiful breakdown, he hurried from the reception-room; past Joseph, the porter, who was standing respectfully

at attention, past an old lady in a jet bonnet, who tried to detain him with some question about a sick relative, past the demure smiles of a pretty probationer in ward number seven, up the stone stairs and past the door of the resident's room, where Martin was hammering out a selection from "The Toreador" on the piano, until he reached, like a poisoned rat, the shelter of his own room. There, all the courage that had sustained him suddenly collapsed. He threw himself on his bed and sobbed incontinently.

It was dark, but for the yellow reflex of street-lamps in the frosted glass of his bedroom window, when he recovered himself. The emotion which had unnerved him was more in the nature of shocked awe than of grief. He had never—if he were strictly honest with himself—loved his father. Usually, as on that afternoon, he had been irritated by him; often he had hated him. Of late he had found his society more distasteful than ever. Nor was it the spectacle of death that had troubled him. He was familiar with that cold presence in guises more terrible than this. But, up to this point, he had regarded death academically, as the final phenomenon in the processes of decay and dissolution that were his study, while this catastrophe was a personal admonition, revealing the darkness of eternity not as an academic concept but as a background, huge and imminent, against which the lives of himself and those he loved were displayed in all their aspects of helplessness and pity. Before it his love, his jealousy, the noble resignation

with which, that day, he had flattered himself, seemed equally futile. Life, at its best, had become a grim affair.

Within his crushed and sobered mind, only one urgent thought declared itself: the picture of his mother, whom he really adored, moving about her dull work in the dark house at Chadshill, patiently waiting, with supper on the table, for the click of the gate, the swinging step of Mr. Dakers on the garden path. How often had she waited for him there, as she was waiting now. If Jonathan had suffered, how much greater a suffering would be hers! Twenty-eight years of patient, loving servitude. For, incredible though it may seem, Mrs. Dakers had loved him, this man whom, perhaps, no other human being had loved. Though Jonathan could neither share that love, nor know that grief, his own love, which she had scorned, or at least disregarded, should be devoted, willingly, utterly, to the hopeless task of softening her desolation. That was not only his duty. It was his passionate privilege to stand by her. Edie, Harold, his career, were thin trifles in comparison. She was waiting there. Already he had lost time. He must go at once.

He switched on the light. Hurriedly, but methodically, he dressed himself, hesitating momentarily before his elaborate necktie, yet discarding black as too significantly macabre. For an instant he caught sight of his own face in the mirror. Was it possible, he thought, that those aged, hardened features, that tragic

mask, were his own. He saw that he had three quarters of an hour to spare before the next train to Brimsley. Perhaps he could hire a motor? The arrival would be too alarming; besides, at that moment, the idea of a motor was sinister. Of course—how stupid!—he must wire to Harold at Dulston. Poor Harold, on the evening of his triumph, among all that jolly company at Silver Street! Then, too, he must make arrangements for his work at the hospital. Martock, who had been so kind already, would look after that. He felt himself finding a strange relief in this violent reaction.

A knock at the door. It was Joseph, the porter, who had thoughtfully carried up a tray of supper for him.

"I thought you'd be better for a bite of something," said Joseph. "And I took the liberty of bringing up a bottle of Guinness. First rate for the nerves, Sir; you'll want it. I needn't say, Sir," he went on awkwardly, "how we've all taken this to heart. There's not a gentleman in the hospital better liked than yourself, if I may say so."

Jonathan thanked him. Of course he could not eat; but it was his duty to let Joseph think that he would. The thought of disappointing anyone in this cruel world distressed him.

"I'm going right out of town to my mother," he told him. "Will you ask Mr. Martock to carry on for me and inform the house governor? I don't want to do any talking if I can avoid it."



"Very good, Sir. You're going by train, Sir? I'll 'phone for a cab."

"No, don't do that. I've plenty of time to walk. It'll do me good."

"There's one thing more, Sir." Joseph hesitated.

"Yes, Joseph?"

"The gentleman's belongings, Sir. We emptied his pockets before they took him to the mortuary. Sister made up a little parcel. Here it is, Sir."

"Thank you."

Jonathan took the parcel and opened it mechanically. A handful of coppers, and sixteen and six in silver. A cracked briar pipe and a tobacco-pouch. A first-class season ticket. A fixture list of the Brimsley Cricket Club. A spectacle-box, empty. A notebook, full of scribbled unfinished verses, and a morocco pocket-book, protected by silver corners.

Jonathan took charge of the money and also of the pocket-case. Midway on the miserable train-journey out to Brimsley, with a vague sense of sacrilege, he opened it. Inside, behind an abraded disc of celluloid, he saw a photograph of his mother, staring at him, with her bland, fixed smile, in the part of Perdita in the *Winter's Tale*. His eyes filled with sudden tears; he could not look at her. As he closed the wallet, dreading further emotion, a sheaf of visiting-cards slipped out and fell on the carriage floor. He picked them up to replace them. They were of two kinds. On the one, in unexceptionable copper-plate, was written:

*Mr. Eugene Dakers,  
Chadshill,  
Brimsley,  
Worcestershire.*

On the others, to his amazement, he read:

*THE FIT-U CORSET CO.  
Midland Representative: E. Dakers.*

## CHAPTER IX

### EPITAPH

THERE followed a terrible week for Jonathan; the hardest part of it that moment when, heavy with ill news, he entered the little garden gate at Chadshill. The blinds, as usual, were not drawn. Within the study the light of Mr. Dakers' reading lamp showed him his mother sitting patiently—just as he had imagined her—with her hands in her lap and, on her lips, a bland and wistful smile. As soon as she heard his step she rose, not to greet him, but to light the lamp in the dining-room. They met, as kind fortune would have it, in the dark hall.

"Mother!"

"Why, Jonathan. Is that you?"

"Yes, mother darling."

"What a surprise. I must lay another place for you. Is your father there?"

"No, mother darling." He took her in his arms and kissed her. Remote, cold woman! She returned his kiss mechanically, as an unconscious, formal duty. She was thinking of Mr. Dakers, not of him.

"Have you seen him?" she said. "He was going to the match. I've been waiting for ages." She laughed uneasily. "I was getting nervous. I almost began to wonder if something had happened."

"I came to tell you, darling," he said. "There has been an accident."

"An accident?" She repeated the word slowly.

"He was knocked down by a motor-car, in the Bristol Road. They brought him to the hospital."

"Ah. . . ." That was all she said; but Jonathan felt her body shudder as she drew breath. He held her close and kissed her. Her cheek was like ice.

"Oh, mother, mother . . ." he said. "How can I tell you?"

"You needn't. I know. . . ."

Her voice was low and terrible. The words scarcely moved her lips; her body, in Jonathan's arms, was motionless as a statue. They stood in the dark passage, crushed beneath intolerable silence, until the cuckoo-clock in Mr. Dakers' study struck nine. Then with a chill deliberation, Mrs. Dakers loosened herself from his arms. She passed, without a word, back into the study. Jonathan followed her. There, with a dreadful sigh, she subsided again into the chair in which he had first seen her. She sat there, staring in front of her, her face a livid, tragic mask; her lips still set in the habitual, fixed smile. She sat and suffered dumbly, like an animal. There was something terribly remote, detached, unearthly about her tearless suffering. That desolation was distant and icy as the poles. He could not approach it, much less take part in it, as he burned to do. She appeared to be not even conscious of his presence. In this moment, which might surely have

drawn them together, the gulf between mother and child yawned vaster and more bleak than ever before. His heart yearned and cried to her. She could not hear it. His eyes entreated her; she could not see them. Her body was with him there, statuesque, stony, insensitive—even in this extremity the pose was perfect, a splendid embodiment of heroic grief—but her soul, for all he could tell, that sad soul which he loved with an instinctive, a mystical devotion, lay lost in infinite distances that no kind of love could penetrate. Those eyes, what they were seeing? He could not guess. Remembered images of that gay young poet, so sanguine, so potent, so full of fire and enthusiasm, who had led her home, through another summer dusk, to that same dim room in the silences of Chadshill? Or was it another vision of the wilful, disappointed, selfish middle-aged man whose moods and exactions had subdued her through so many lonely years? He could not tell. One thing, at least, he knew and was thankful for. She could not see, would never see, what he had seen; that seedy, crumpled figure on the ambulance stretcher; that high, bronzed forehead, caked with blood and dust; those eyes, staring upward in blank surprise; those lips, the mouthpiece of so much extravagance and wayward cruelty, frozen, at the last, in a sardonic smile. Suddenly, wherever her thoughts may have been, Mrs. Dakers returned to herself. Her voice was low, measured, dreadfully composed.

“Jonathan, are you there?”

"Yes, mother darling." His own voice trembled shamefully.

"You saw him at the hospital. It was all over then?"

"Yes, yes. Thank God! At least it was instantaneous."

"Have you told Harold?"

"I wired to him at once."

"I'm sorry. I wish you hadn't"

"Why, mother darling?"

"This cricket match. Your father would have preferred him not to know. He thought more of Harold's playing than anything else. He would have wished him to go on. I'm sure of that."

"I'm afraid it's too late now. Besides . . ." he hesitated.

"He would have wished it," Mrs Dakers repeated firmly.

She rose, and moved majestically toward the door.

"I think I had better make up your bed," she said.

"Don't bother to do that, darling. Leave it to me."

"I would rather do it, Jonathan. Then I shall go to bed myself. Good-night."

"Oh, mother, mother," he cried. But his cry did not reach her.

"You will find some supper," she said, "on the dining-room table."

She lit a candle, methodically, without a tremor, and was gone. Jonathan, his heart bursting with emotion, watched her slow, stately progress up the narrow stairs.

During all the awful week that followed, through

which Jonathan remained at Chadshill, Mrs. Dakers' movements were marked by the same inhuman composure. Not even when they stood by the grave in Halesby churchyard, nor when they returned, in dumb misery, to Chadshill, did Jonathan see a single tear in her eyes. It seemed as though she was unaware of the overpowering emotion—which was fuller of sorrow for her than of grief for their father—which he and Harold suffered. Perhaps she had suffered so heavily from Mr. Dakers in life that her mind was too numbed to feel the shock of his death. Perhaps she had been so long the mere vehicle of his thoughts and emotions that, lacking them, she was nothing, a dumb and stony oracle. Perhaps, under his tuition, she had been so used to playing a part that was set for her, to the last detail of speech and dress, of gesture and bearing, that the original, natural woman, who had lived and borne children, had actually ceased to exist. Perhaps she had chosen the new part, that she played with a grace so queenly and tragic, deliberately, as being the one which Mr. Dakers' taste would have approved. Whatever its inspiration may have been she played that part superbly: a Roman matron, of the best Shakespearean model.

That was her function. Of course the burden of the business fell on Jonathan. Harold was willing to help—Harold was splendid; indeed, the emergency evoked in him a strength of character, a level-headedness, an unselfishness which Jonathan would have taken for granted, but had never yet seen displayed. A provi-

dential rainfall had brought the cricket-match to an end. The Martyns—apart from one short note from Edie—"Oh, poor, dear Jonathan!" she wrote—and an elaborate wreath from the family, had vanished from the scene. Harold and Jonathan, more intimate in this disaster than ever before, were left alone to tackle the astounding confusion of Mr. Dakers' affairs.

How great that confusion was they had no idea until its complications overwhelmed them. Mr. Dakers, an ill-shaven little Hebrew named Greenberg in the Jewellers' Quarter at North Bromwich informed them (only he called him Dakerth without any Mr.) had been an agent, working on commission, for his own firm, the Fit-U Corset Company. And Mr. Dakerth's accounts, he might say, had been left in a very bad way. Probably, at the moment of his death, he had owed the Fit-U Corset Company upwards of thirty pounds.

"Of course it will be paid," Jonathan assured him.

"That's all very well, doctor," said Mr. Greenberg, nastily. "What I want to know is: who are Dakerth's cut-throats?"

"I've told you that you will be paid," Jonathan reiterated.

"When?" Mr. Greenberg was a realist. "If you've no objection, I may say that Dakerth was shady cut-throat. No offence intended." Whether offence had been intended or no, Harold had taken it. For the moment Mr. Greenberg's nose was in danger.



"Give him a cheque, for God's sake, Jonathan," he said.

A good many cheques were given, in circumstances equally humiliating. In Brimsley itself, bills that the minute accretions of years had made enormous began to pour in. The local carpenter had not yet been paid for the new Cricket Pavilion. There was not a farmer in the district who hadn't, at some time or other, supplied the household with produce. Within a few days Jonathan's bank balance had dwindled dangerously, and still, like autumn leaves, the bills drifted in.

Jonathan attempted to take his mother into their confidence. She, it appeared, knew nothing—nothing whatever. Mr. Dakers had regarded such mundanities as outside a refined woman's sphere. She could not even say if he had made a will. Mr. Dudley Wilburn, the North Bromwich solicitor, would probably know about it.

Harold and Jonathan together visited Dudley Wilburn's office in Sackville Row. It seemed that Dudley Wilburn was away; his brother and partner, Ernest Wilburn, received them; a man of the world, kindly and polished, who immediately flattered Harold by alluding to the fine innings he had played for Cambridge. He called in his brother's confidential clerk and consulted him. Yes, there was a will. There were also some papers relating to some trust. Ah, here they were! Securities amounting to ten thousand pounds,

bequeathed to Jonathan Dakers, which had been handed over, with interest accruing, to the sole trustee, Eugene Dakers, on the said Jonathan Dakers attaining his eighteenth year. The money was to be used for educational purposes until the legatee came of age. Of course they could have a copy of the will at once. If Jonathan cared to instruct him, he would apply for probate. Money? Well, that, of course, was another matter. The business had passed out of their hands some years ago. He suggested that Jonathan should read the will, which might furnish some indication, and then apply to Mr. Dakers' bank.

The manager of the bank was less polite. He appeared to regard both Jonathan and Harold with suspicion. Yes, Mr. Dakers had kept a current account, though he, himself, had never had the pleasure of his acquaintance. As soon as the will was proved, the balance, no doubt, would be handed over. Certainly he would let them know what the balance was. He rang, and a clerk brought in a slip. Seventy eight pounds fourteen and three pence. Securities? Of course, he would make enquiries.

They waited, while another clerk was sent to make them. In the meantime the manager excused himself, and went on with his work. When the new message came he shook his head and pursed his lips, "We have," he said, "certificates for three thousand pounds' worth, nominal value, of shares"—Jonathan's heart fell; surely it was ten thousand?—purchased at the time of

the boom, five years ago, in the stock of the Sedgebury Main Colliery."

Sedgebury Main? The name was of ill omen. It brought to Jonathan's mind the memory of a disaster which, in the autumn before, had shaken the financial foundations of the whole district. In one black day the waters that were under the earth had whelmed the galleries of the Sedgebury Main and three hundred souls within them. Last night he and Harold had watched the sun go down in wrath behind its gaunt, motionless headgear. That monument of ruin was now known as Fatherless Bairn.

The manager was watching him closely. This young man took it gallantly. He was sorry for him, if that were any consolation.

"Sedgebury Main?" Jonathan was repeating. "That sounds pretty bad. Can you give me any idea, Sir, what these shares are worth?"

The manager hesitated. Any words must sound cruel. However. . . .

"Exactly the value of the paper they are printed on," he replied.

"Thank you very much, Sir. I'll write to you later," said Jonathan.

"Anything that I can do to help you," said the manager, vaguely. They went out bewildered into the roar of Queen Street. Harold took Jonathan's arm. That firm grip was the only stable thing in a reeling world.

"Sounds pretty bad, as you were saying, Jonathan," he said. "It really rather looks as if we were in the soup."

He laughed. Thank God he can laugh, at any rate, thought Jonathan.

A Tilton 'bus swayed past them. They swung aboard it. By walking home from Tilton they could save the railway fare. Everything counted now. Last time he had travelled on the Tilton 'bus, he had been with Edie—Edie, so fresh and exquisite in a white silk blouse. No more dreams of Edie, he told himself. For the moment he had forgotten that he had renounced Edie five days before, on the day of his father's death. Only five days? Was time a reality? The voice of Harold broke in on these reflections:

"I say, old fellow, no more Cambridge for me. I've been pretty careless too. I owe a devil of a lot."

"Don't think about it, Hal. Wait till we've read the will."

"I'm damned glad of one thing anyway. I've got my Blue," said Harold.

That evening after supper, with Mrs. Dakers posed disinterestedly in the shadows, they read their father's will. It was a lengthy document, and, on the whole, the highest of Mr. Dakers' imaginative flights. As an expression of the writer's personality it could not have been bettered; as a piece of grim irony it was unique. Evidently Mr. Dakers had given a great deal of thought to it, remembering, perhaps, that the will of

his predecessor, Shakespeare, was a valuable literary document.

It began, rather vaguely, with a long panegyric of his beloved wife Lavinia, chivalrously exalting the beauty, the talent, the unselfishness by which she had made their long married life a perfect love-song. There were allusions to Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura. In recognition of the inspiration which she had afforded him, he bequeathed to Mrs. Dakers a life-interest in everything of which he stood possessed, with reversion, on her decease, to his younger son, Harold—his elder son Jonathan being already provided for. Mrs. Dakers was also to be his sole executrix. As first charges on his estate he was scrupulous to mention the payment of his lawful debts. There followed minute instructions as to the disposal of his literary remains, which were to be published on English hand-made paper, with a biographical memoir, for which materials had been provided, under the editorial discretion of his son Harold. A schedule carefully defined the poems and fragments which he wished to be included, with particular reference to the tragedy *Alfred of England* which, he prayed God humbly, he might be spared to complete. He further directed that on Mrs. Dakers' death, his holograph manuscripts should be divided between the British Museum and the North Bromwich Library, to which last he also bequeathed in reversion all inscribed copies of his first editions. A happily conceived codicil directed that the sum of

twenty-five pounds should be applied to the purchase of a trophy, to be known as the Eugene Dakers Shield, and competed for annually by village cricket clubs whose grounds were situate within the faithful county of Worcester, and a similar sum expended on reconditioning the tomb of his brother poet, Shenstone, in Halesby churchyard. From first to last there was no mention made of Jonathan's trust fund. A scrutiny of Mr. Dakers' diaries showed that all of it with the exception of three thousand pounds, which had been subtracted for the purposes of (Harold's) education, had been, illegally, invested in the speculative shares of the Sedgebury Main, and no longer existed except on paper. The final balance-sheet of the estate showed on the credit side, the sum of seventy-eight pounds fourteen and threepence in the bank, a life insurance policy for five hundred pounds, which Jonathan was astonished to find valid, and, finally, the books and furniture of Chadshill. The debts, which Jonathan had already paid as far as he was able, were still incalculable. As Harold had picturesquely put it, they were in the soup.

Uncomfortable as the situation was, it would have been easier if at this juncture Mrs. Dakers had not suddenly, and for the first time, taken an active part in it by insisting on the literal fulfilment of Mr. Dakers' depositions. In death, as in life, her husband's wishes were a sacred charge. The pitiful literary remains must be edited, the memoir written, the

ridiculous challenge shield purchased, and Shenstone's tomb repaired. Out of her dumb desolation she emerged into the performance of a new and fascinating rôle: that of a great man's widow, devoting herself, nobly, tragically, to an illustrious memory. Deprived of the guidance of Mr. Dakers' stage direction, she was inclined to overact it; freed, at the same time, from his repressions and the slavery of serving him, she put into her performance an energy that was embarrassing. Without having anything to say or any capacity for affairs she became loquacious and managing. Mr. Dakers had known what he was about when he kept her quiet and picturesque, as Harold and Jonathan soon realized to their cost.

The sympathies and condolences of her neighbours in Halesby, from whose society Mr. Dakers had carefully isolated her, went to her head. She began to receive calls and return them, an impressive figure in her black gown and trailing widow's weeds. She talked, continually and impressively, of Mr. Dakers, and usually carried a book of his poems with her wherever she went. The lamentations that Mr. Dakers had confided to her concerning his own neglected genius became part of her repertoire, and even Jonathan and Harold, who had other things to think about, found themselves compelled, out of sheer pity, to listen to her. However hard they tried, however gently they persuaded, they could not induce her to abandon her tragic rôle, or, for one moment, face uncomfortable facts.

The facts, in brief, were these. Harold's career at Cambridge was definitely over: except as a professional cricketer he had no qualification for earning a living. Jonathan, providentially, could support himself by his profession—himself, but no more than himself. Mrs. Dakers, when all the bills were paid and the provisions of the will completed, would be left with a capital sum of three hundred and eighty pounds and the unexpired lease of Chadshill—with an income, to put it shortly, that would barely pay the rent. The situation was impossible. Something must be done at once to deal with it; and Jonathan, naturally, must do it.

First of all he resigned his hospital appointment; the nominal stipend of a house-surgeon would carry him nowhere. Next, he talked the whole matter over with his idol, Lloyd Moore. Lloyd Moore, who was not only a surgical genius but a man of the world, and liked Jonathan for his own sake, listened sympathetically.

"I'd hoped to go in for surgery, and take my fellowship," Jonathan told him. "Of course that's utterly out of the question now. There's nothing for me but general practice, I'm afraid."

"Why are you afraid?" said Lloyd Moore. "What's wrong with general practice?"

"It isn't what I had hoped for."

"Life never is." The great man shook his head. "We surgeons," he said, "are most of us spectacular frauds. The operating theatre is—well, theatrical. The best, the most useful, the noblest—don't let's be



afraid of the word!—men I've ever known have been general practitioners."

Jonathan smiled. "It wasn't exactly nobility that I was thinking of. What I want is money."

"You have a brother. What about him? Can't he contribute anything?"

"Not yet. He's just got his cricket blue at Cambridge."

"That's useful! What money have you?"

"Nothing of my own. My mother has something less than four hundred pounds."

"About as much use as a Cambridge blue. You must borrow money. I did. You haven't any other . . . encumbrances?"

Jonathan thought of Edie. Alas, he hadn't! He shook his head: "Who's going to lend me money without security?" he asked.

"I am. Why not? It's quite a legitimate investment. What you want to find is a practice that's going cheap. You're very young. A partnership would be preferable. Some decent old gentleman, well established, who wants to retire. There must be dozens of them."

"It's splendidly generous of you to suggest it, Sir. I've been hearing rather too much of debts just lately to like them. If I can possibly help it I'd rather not borrow."

"Don't be a damned fool," said Lloyd Moore abruptly. "I shall give you a letter now to the manager

at Edmondsons'. These wholesale druggists know exactly what's going; their travellers call on all the general practitioners in the district. You'd better stay in this part of the world to be near your mother. Besides, you're a North Bromwich man; your connections will help you, and, quite incidentally, I can keep an eye on you."

He began to write, in his swift, illegible hand, talking rapidly to Jonathan as his pen raced over the paper; "Dear Longmead—that's the name of Edmondsons' manager. I've known him for years; you can trust him absolutely. What you want is a practice that will bring you in a small, steady income from the first day. If you're energetic, you'll soon increase it. Don't bury yourself in the country . . . sweet, old-world villages! The country is dead. North Bromwich sucks it dry. An industrial neighbourhood; possibilities of expansion. Make yourself a slave, and work like hell. Apart from everything else, that's the way to be happy. Surgery? If you're keen enough surgery will come to you. When people begin to trust you. That's how I started. I did my first surgery as an unqualified assistant to an old josser in Dulston. Strangulated hernia. It suppurated and died. It wasn't my fault that time, though it generally is. Well, well, here's Longmead's letter. As soon as you want the money just let me know."

Jonathan tried to thank him. He wouldn't be thanked. This vivid, red-bearded little man was impatient of sentiment.

"What about that brother of yours?" he said, as Jonathan left him. "It seems to me that he's the only difficulty left."

Yes, Harold was the only difficulty. Yet Harold was splendid. Without him Jonathan could hardly have borne Mrs. Dakers' exalted poses. The shadow of jealousy that had fallen on Jonathan's mind at the cricket match no longer troubled him. All that old, enchanted life to which Edie belonged lay lost beyond far horizons, lost for ever. Whatever strange landfalls this new existence might reveal—and, heaven knew, it was mysterious enough—they were as lonely, at that moment, he and his mother and Harold, as a small craft tossing on the misty swell of mid-Atlantic. In that uncertain isolation he could not ask for a better comrade than Harold, a soul more gallant, more honest, more lovable.

This renewal of the comradeship which they had known as children and then lost was the greatest compensation that these hard times gave to Jonathan. Now that Edie was removed, not only as a source of possible rivalry between them but as a sweet aspiration, Harold had regained his ancient sway over Jonathan's heart. His principal preoccupation, for the near future, was Harold's happiness; and though Harold himself was afraid of no work, however humiliating, that might enable him to make himself independent of Jonathan's support, Jonathan was anxious, above all things, not to lose sight of him.

Walking over the bare crown of Uffdown, swept by Autumn's windy splendours, they thrashed the problem over and over again; and those long walks, full of vexatious questionings and frustrations as they were, gave to their renewed intimacy a curious sense of solidarity from which his heart drew courage and content.

The progress of Mr. Longmead's investigations pointed to an obvious answer to their doubts. The manager at Edmondsons', fired by Lloyd Moore's enthusiasm, succeeded, after a little while, in finding the very thing; a practice at Wednesford, in the heart of the Black Country, at present in the possession of an old man named Hammond. Dr. Hammond had practised in Wednesford for more than forty years; the practice, and the house that went with it, were deeply established in the minds of Wednesford people; and although the doctor's failing energies had "let the practice down"—as Longmead put it—there was every reason to suppose that new blood and life would pull it up again. Dr. Hammond's needs were modest; he lived alone with his unmarried daughter; six hundred pounds would buy a two-thirds share of the practice—say, roughly, five hundred a year, with an option to purchase, on a valuation, at the end of four years. In the meantime the incoming partner's expenses would be negligible. It was to Jonathan's interest that he should live in the Hammonds' house. Longmead had put the matter to Lloyd Moore, who had approved of it. He

knew and trusted Hammond. He strongly advised Dr. Dakers to accept at once.

Five hundred a year. The sum seemed enormous to Jonathan. Mrs. Dakers, at Chadshill, could easily live on a hundred and fifty. Besides, in a few years, the income was bound to increase. If Harold found work in North Bromwich he could live with his mother; the idea of Mrs. Dakers being left alone was repellent to both of them.

But Harold's work? It was only after long cogitations that the obvious solution leapt to Jonathan's mind. In four years' time Dr. Hammond would be retiring; the practice, expanded by Jonathan, would have room for another partner. So why, in the name of common-sense, shouldn't that partner be Harold? His Cambridge "little-go" would admit him to the North Bromwich Medical School; in five years—just in time, in other words—he would be qualified and ready to step into Dr. Hammond's empty shoes. It was clear that providence itself had designed this arrangement; the whole thing worked out pat, like a game of patience!

Once more the problem of expense presented itself. Jonathan waved it aside. In his first years at North Bromwich he had lived on little enough in all conscience; and Harold could do the same. Lloyd Moore would look after him. Of course he would have to be careful; but North Bromwich was not Cambridge. There were plenty of students in Jonathan's years who had managed to rub along on narrower means than his

own. And then . . . Only five years! Time would pass swiftly.

Even though he did not reflect Jonathan's enthusiasm, Harold was complaisant. In the absence of any vocation, except a vague leaning in the direction of literature which had been planted in his mind by Mr. Dakers, he was as willing to earn his living in that profession as in any other. What he couldn't so easily stomach was the prospect of being a burden on Jonathan for so long.

"A burden?" said Jonathan. "Ridiculous!" He was on fire. "When once you begin, it'll get hold of you, Hal; there's nothing in the world as fascinating as medicine. Besides, it'll keep us together. I know the ropes. I shall always be able to help you. I believe I'm a damned good coach, if only I were put to it. Of course, you'll get scholarships, and that'll help us too. Then, Wednesford's only ten miles from North Bromwich. You'll be able to get over to me easily in half an hour. Great days, my boy, great days! It's nothing to laugh about."

For Harold was smiling. "Good old Jonathan!" he said.

They presented their plan to Mrs. Dakers as an accomplished fact. She listened to it blandly, taking it as a matter of course. She hadn't realized, for one moment, that there had been any difficulty. "It will be nice for me to have dear Harold with me," she said. Then, in a petulant tone, she began to lecture Jonathan

about the delay in the proof sheets of Mr. Dakers' *Posthumous Poems*, which was the title on which she had decided.

"I can't imagine how you let the printers play with us like this," she said. "It's perfectly scandalous, in my opinion. Your father," she added reproachfully, "was always so business-like."

## END OF BOOK ONE

BOOK TWO

WEDNESFORD





## WEDNESFORD

### CHAPTER I

#### HAMMOND AND DAKERS

ON the last day of October, in a season when the Black Country is not at its best, Jonathan Dakers left North Bromwich for Wednesford to take up his partnership with old Dr. Hammond. During the course of the negotiations which Longmead, Edmondsons' manager, had conducted for him, he had made several short visits to Wednesford; but now that the business was settled and the agreement signed, he began to regard the scene of his new labours with a romantic and proprietary air.

He approached it along a railway that cut through the central desolation of the Black Country, leaving the Stourton branch-line at Astbury to plunge into that wide valley, sterile as a lunar landscape, which lies between the heights of Sedgebury, crowned by the skeletal headgear of Fatherless Bairn Colliery, and the Wolverbury ridge, where Hingston's black furnace-towers flared against a deeper darkness. At that time of the year no blade of grass was visible. The surface of the land, scarred like a battlefield, cumbered by metallic débris—huge rusty circular boilers, stranded like buoys,

discarded fly-wheels, stacks of trolley-rails, coiled cables, frayed, unravelled, and monstrous dumps of indiscriminate scrap-iron—was scattered with boulders of slag and drifts of cinders as though some volcanic catastrophe had whelmed and blighted it.

Over this slagged waste of carbon and dead metal a network of narrow-gauge mineral-lines spread, as it seemed, haphazard; and on them, like derelict engines of war, stood strings of trucks, some empty, some loaded with tawny iron ore, coal, coke, china-clay, stone and sand—the prime materials of the district's merchandise, abandoned, apparently, in this phlegraean desert. Sometimes, with a sudden rumble, the train crossed iron bridges, spanning straight lengths of canal whose dense, stagnant waters, sterilized by the acid effluents of factories, reflected a low sky bronzed with eternal smoke. And sometimes, like ruined towers commanding a border once debateable but now abandoned, tall engine-houses, each with its tottering smoke-stack and old beam-engine, and, perhaps, the wooden skeleton of hauling-gear from which wheels and cables had been stripped, revealed the site of humble, derelict collieries whose seams had been despoiled to feed the red throats of furnaces that had ceased to sigh before Jonathan was born.

For this land, indeed, was just as dead as it seemed; as dead as Thebes or the cities of the Incas; the midden of a civilization now extinct, the shell of an area, once swarming and prosperous, sucked dry and deserted as

the march of industry moved Westward to Wolverbury. On the East, the fringe of Wednesford touched this desolation. Its railway station had been built there fifty years before, when the desert, if no longer green, was still alive, and Wednesford itself a village, already half debased, yet breathing still the air of pleasant fields beyond.

A gracious village it must have been, Jonathan thought, as he carried his bag down the station steps and saw, within the circle of new buildings whose staring yellow bricks were already grimed with soot, a definable nucleus of red-tiled roofs and a graceful perpendicular church-tower of grey sandstone. A new road, metalled, and edged with blue-brick pavements, had been driven straight as an arrow from the station into the heart of the old village, its course defined by two uniform rows of workmen's houses that rose on either side like the walls of a culvert. Among these, breaking their monotony with an ornateness that was just as offensive, stood two public buildings faced with terra-cotta: a Police Station, and a Cottage Hospital, whose size suggested that Wednesford, humble though it might be, did not lag behind its more important neighbours in crime or in disease. Yet, when he saw the Hospital, Jonathan was encouraged. To him it seemed the scene of future triumphs; the place where, Heaven willing, he would practise surgery. Old Dr. Hammond, as he knew already, was afraid of the knife, though the rival firm, Drs. Craig and Monaghan, were more ambitious.

He must make friends with them, he thought, as soon as possible.

The straight New Road (as it was called) ended abruptly on the edge of a valley, through which the Stour, that familiar stream which rose from the hills within a mile of Chadshill, slunk, turbid and polluted already with the defilements of Halesby and Mawne, to lose its debased identity in the Severn at Stourmouth. A brick bridge, clamped with stays and girders of iron to withstand the strain of subterranean stresses, and flanked by the smoke-plumed chimneys of a foundry, spanned a fall of water, tawny and opaque, boiling into a pool of black-slimed sandstone, which once had nourished trout, but was now a depository for tins, broken bottles, and rotting cabbage stalks. Beyond this bridge, and through the yellowish veil of smoke spread from the spouting foundry chimneys, the roofs of eighteenth century Wednesford, successors of those wooden dwellings that Mercian Saxons had built upon the Ford sacred to Woden, rose, warped and fantastically distorted as a mediæval castle, toward the crowning pinnacle of the church tower. Among them a pattern of street-lamps, newly lighted, bloomed one after another like flowers.

A lovely village it must once have been, Jonathan told himself, on such an evening as this, when the vanished birches along the riverside stood bare, their silvery trunks reflected in clear, trout-ringed glides; blue wood-smoke stealing up straight in the still air from comfortable chimneys, and perhaps a string of

packhorses plodding in over the narrow bridge. For the inn at the bottom of the valley, facing the foundry-gates, and renovated in bastard black-and-white by Messrs. Astill, the North Bromwich brewers, was still called The Pack-horse.

Even now, as he lugged his leaden portmanteau up the steep street, those dusky red houses, with here and there a string-course of dog-toothed brick, rayed fan-lights and latticed windows of whorled bottle-glass, seemed, in the dusk, to have preserved a certain graciousness, though the acrid air had eaten into the pointings between their bricks, and the subsidence of abandoned mine-galleries, hundreds of feet beneath them, had rent their walls with spreading diagonal cracks and tilted their whole structures out of the perpendicular, leaving them to suffer the disintegrating strains of gravity until sheer danger condemned them to abandonment. Even now their owners' neglect had let them degenerate into a slum. On the sandstone steps that sagged to the roadway squalid women were wrangling; the broken casements were stuffed with old trousers and paper. In the roadway ragged children squalled and shouted and cannoned against Jonathan's legs. As he went lurching up the hillside neither man nor woman gave him good-evening.

At the top of the rise the road turned to the right. From the wide gates of a gasworks, which displayed a pair of red gasometers and mounds of slack, an air charged with sulphur drifted across the road. The

workmen were going home. They looked tired and dogged. There was neither relief nor anticipation of pleasure in their soot-rimmed eyes. The sooty circles gave to their white sclerotics a glint of savageness. Jonathan, with his country habits, saluted them as they met; but not one of them returned his salutation. They mingled as they emerged, with another and a blacker stream of colliers slouching home from pits on the other side of Wednesford, dwarfed figures, uniformly blackened with coal-dust, each wearing, strapped to his cap, a miniature safety-lamp, which made him look like the product of some other-wordly, mechanical life, such as the Martians in Wells' romance, which Jonathan had been reading. They passed, in endless procession, trudging home dumbly. No sound came from them but a ringing of hobnailed boots and the clink of empty tin cans in which they had carried their cold tea to the pits.

Beyond the gasworks the street abandoned all dignity, narrowing into the squalor of a later, Victorian Wednesford. The houses here were lower, uniform, and devoid of any attempt at architectural adornment; a façade of mean, rectangular boxes roofed with slate and pierced at regular intervals by noisome passages, narrow and black as the galleries of a coalmine, leading to the congeries of "courts" that clustered behind. Above these sinister openings a series of names carved in freestone—Hodgett's Court, Bagley's Court, Jay's Court—perpetuated the pride and shame of petty local landlords

who had profited by the Victorian birth-rate to sell foul air for as much as it would fetch.

Through all this dreary street, the roadway, the pavements, the blank faces of the houses were grimed with smoke as black as the colliers' clothes. The newly-lighted street-lamps shone through a blear of carbon. The only lights unmarred by that ubiquitous element glittered through the steam of fried-fish shops, tripe-shops, or from opaque windows, decorated by flamboyant designs in frosted glass, which advertised the virtues of civilization's sole and triumphant antidote to coal-dust, that brew of fermented glucose sharpened with quassia which bore the name of Astill's Entire. In such a uniform picture of squalor these public-house windows provided, for all the vulgarity of their plate-glass decorations, the only visible note of cheerfulness. Their cleanliness, their gleaming brasses, proclaimed the careless prosperity of the only industry, in all the Black Country, that flourished on bad times.

Beside the relative luxuriance of this evil floridity the shops which huddled, as though for mutual support and protection, at the head of the street, looked mean and decadent. On Saturday nights, when wages had been paid, they would vie in activity with the public-houses, whose trade was less dependent on time and season. That evening in the middle of the week, they were merely marking time. The fruit and vegetables in the greengrocers' windows looked shrunken and jaded. The faces of the shopkeepers, who stood at



their doors surveying Jonathan's arrival, seemed wan, listless, lost in the fatalistic torpor of mid-week. The air of the street smelt of salt fish and dying vegetables. On the trampled sawdust that strewed the pavement in front of an Argentine meat-shop, a mongrel sheep-dog, gnawing a bone that had been flung to it, impeded Jonathan's burdened progress and snarled at him as he passed.

Jonathan laughed at him: "Poor old boy!" he said. All through that toilsome tramp up from the station he had been almost unaware of the depression that surrounded him. For him the blazing public-house windows signified nothing but good cheer; that sordid street was the virgin field of his new labours; those tired colliers, those tradesmen moping at their shop-doors, were members of the new community on which his hopes of successful practice were based, invested, by his high hope, with the air of partners in a romantic adventure.

Tomorrow—perhaps even tonight, that adventure would begin. His mind was cleared for action; the moment which now approached was that for which his years of probation in North Bromwich had prepared him. It sealed his willing slavery, proclaimed his freedom. The first tinkle of the surgery bell would ring up the curtain on the most serious scene of his life. In the meantime, this damned bag was so heavy that it gave him no chance of organised thought.

Just short of the churchyard gates the shops dis-

creetly ended, giving place to a group of more impressive houses, Georgian in date, their pillared doorways decorated by the brass plates of auctioneers, solicitors and joint-stock banks. In front of the smallest of these, a squat building faced with stucco, joined to one neighbour, but separated from the other by a narrow passage, a red lamp burned dimly, revealing in letters of uncoloured glass the word: SURGERY. A brass plate, so sedulously polished in bygone years that the sunken letters were almost flush with the surface, but now dull and tarnished, announced the name and qualifications of its owner: *John Hammond, L.S.A., L.R.C.S., Physician and Surgeon*. As he dumped his bag beside the worn sandstone steps, Jonathan was thinking how much better *J. Dakers, M.B., M.Ch.* would look. He had ordered the new plate in North Bromwich that morning.

He seized the brass bell-pull; an old-fashioned spring-bell echoed within. He waited. Along a flagged passage he heard a shuffle of slow feet. Whoever their owner might be, he was in no hurry. In a doctor's house, he thought, the bell should be answered more promptly. Then the door opened, and a young woman stared at him.

"Good evening," he said. "I think you're expecting me."

"You are Dr. Dakers?" she answered. "Step in, please."

In the Black Country you are always told to step in.

"I'm sorry," she went on. "I'm afraid my father is out—at a midwifery case; he's been at it most of the day."

"Then you are Miss Hammond?" Jonathan asked.

She nodded. "You have your bag there? Please let me take it. I'd better show you to your room."

She grasped the handle of the bag. As Jonathan forestalled her, his hand met hers.

"Nonsense!" he said. "Whatever are you talking about? Of course I'll carry it myself, if you'll show me the way."

She surrendered the bag without another word. He had the impression that her offer had been mechanical, the automatic gesture of a mind that was used to effacing itself, of hands that were accustomed to relieve hands older and feebler of all exertion.

"If you'll wait a second," she said, "I'll get some matches, so that we can light the gas upstairs."

Before he had time to tell her he had a box in his pocket, she was gone. Returning a moment later, the suspended gas light revealed her as a tall, dark young woman, probably of his own age. She wore a black skirt covered by a print apron, a black blouse, high at the neck, with a white frill and jabot, and the low-heeled leather slippers which Jonathan had heard dragging over the hall floor. Her body was big and powerful—he could see, at a glance, that she could easily have carried his bag if he had let her—yet, for all its apparent strength, not without grace. Her face, indeed, had

a certain solemn beauty: black hair, not dead, but with the life of copper in it, was swept back, like a Spaniard's, on either side of an ivory parting; beneath it he saw a brow made serious by two horizontal furrows; black eyebrows, too heavy for beauty, whose straightness gave the dark eyes beneath them a look of slightly puzzled determination, as though their owner were used to fighting against odds; a straight, well-chiselled nose; lips, full and possibly sulky, modified by the firmness of a mouth that was larger than it might have been and seemed redder for the healthy pallor of her face.

She was, in fact, the complete physical opposite of the type that had always attracted Jonathan and found its apotheosis in Edie's classical fairness; yet even his prejudices could not deny her a certain nobility. If Edie were a Tanagra Diana vividly escaping from the clay that bound her, this girl, in her more massive mould, was a marble Demeter, magnificently slow, static, yet nursing within her statuesque passivity a smoulder no less potent than Edie's flying flame. Without being in the least enchanted, Jonathan was impressed. Her black eyes met his unflinchingly; the full lips did not smile. He had the feeling that though nothing came from within her to meet him, some secret, inward tribunal was summing him up. Her scrutiny, though brief, was embarrassing. He tried, in self-defence, to break it with a smile.

"When I came here before," he said, "I didn't have the pleasure of seeing you."

It struck him that "pleasure," in some subtle way, was considered to be the wrong word.

"I was busy, both times," she said. "All the same, I saw you. I saw you pass the window when you were going away."

This time he dared to joke: "Well, did you think I'd do?"

Again her eyes considered him; her lips, for one moment, parted in a faint smile; her teeth were fine and regular, and very white against the red lips. The dark straight brows contracted slightly; her voice was low, and dark like all the rest of her.

"Yes," she said, almost contemptuously. "I suppose you'll do. You've got to do now, anyway, haven't you? Will you please step upstairs."

The room to which she led him was heavily furnished with a mahogany four-post bed; the wardrobe, chest-of-drawers and wash-hand stand were also of massive mahogany; a threadbare Brussels carpet, another relic of Victorian prosperity, covered the floor. Beside the bed the light of a single incandescent gas-mantle throbbed uncertainly. Jonathan tried to regulate it.

"You can't do anything with that," a low voice told him, "it's the poor quality of the gas. I'll bring you some hot water in a moment."

"No, don't do that, Miss Hammond," he implored her. "Honestly, cold will do."

But already her measured, soft steps were descending the stairs. A queer creature, Jonathan reflected.

He couldn't make anything of her. He lifted the window-sash and stared out into the night. In the foreground nothing was visible but a low slate roof darkened by condensed moisture and the crown of a bare-boughed apple-tree shagged with American blight. Beyond, through the dank, autumnal air, at incalculable distances, the smoulder of spoil-banks, abandoned, yet still living, bedecked with steamy nebulæ and starry scintillations the desolation through which he had approached Wednesford that afternoon. The air which the heat of the room drew through the window carried with it an acrid, cindery odour, a smell of fire. In his nostrils there was another smell, provocative, autumnal. He discovered its source in a bunch of yellow chrysanthemums set in a vase on the mahogany dressing-table. A woman's hand. Miss Hammond's. That, at least, was graceful. He must remember to thank her.

A tap at the door: "Your hot water."

And again, before he could protest or thank her, she was gone.

Probably it was just shyness that made her so forbidding and uncommunicative. A strange young man, arriving, unannounced, in the house where she was alone; the junior partner and the doctor's daughter—what could be more obvious as the beginning for an old-fashioned romance? Jonathan laughed to himself as he dipped his face in the hard Staffordshire water. Old Hammond's daughter—what was her name? he wondered—had no need to hope for a romance nor fear one

so far as he was concerned. Life, for the next few years, would be an unromantic business governed by hard, practical considerations, the improvement of the practice, the scraping together of money for Harold's fees and for the upkeep of Chadshill. And Miss Hammond—whatever her name might be—wasn't his type; those dark, slow women had never appealed to him and never would. But why, he suddenly asked himself, was he even considering her from this point of view? There had been nothing whatever in her behaviour, poor soul, to justify it. Because—he made truthful answer, drying his hands on the white well-ironed towel—because that was the natural attitude of a healthy young man toward any woman whom he might meet in intimate circumstances of this kind. *L'homme sensuel moyen? Sensuel* be damned! Edie would understand. He could see her smiling at his self-questionings, his ponderous explanations. For, though he had resigned himself to the idea of renouncing her—her whom he had never possessed—the image, the voice, the smile of Edie had a way of stealing back into his mind when he least expected them.

He turned down the gas to a blue glimmer of by-pass and descended the stairs. The principal living-room, in which he had twice interviewed Dr. Hammond, was on the left. A quick fire burned in the grate; the air of the room was warm and welcoming. The table had been laid in preparation for a frugal supper. On the right of the fire stood a big armchair, its cushions

moulded to the imprint of a familiar body. Beside it, with toes in the fender, lay a pair of slippers. Dr. Hammond's, no doubt. Devoted daughter! This room, like his own bedroom, was furnished with a heavy, Victorian comfort. The carpet was worn, the drawn curtains looked shabby and faded; yet, in the careful dustless order of everything, as in the spotless table-linen, the shining glass and silver, so different from the haphazard shabbiness of Chadshill, he was aware of a personal, feminine attention which he couldn't help referring to Miss Hammond.

The impression of slowness which she had given him was probably mistaken; he remembered the business-like way in which she had seized his bag, the promptitude with which hot water had appeared from nowhere at his bedroom door. It seemed possible that she was running the house single-handed, in which case his own arrival would make her busier than ever; he must be careful to add as little work as possible. Meanwhile, this crackle of flaring coals was very comfortable; he would sit down and wait there for Dr. Hammond's arrival. To-morrow the new life would seriously begin.

A low voice, speaking his own name, disturbed him. He rose quickly. Miss Hammond was standing in the doorway.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," she said. "My father isn't back yet, and the surgery is full of people. If you wouldn't mind . . ."

Of course he wouldn't mind. She led him through



the back of the house to the one-storied building whose roof he had seen from his bedroom window. It was a long room, divided by varnished deal partitions into three compartments. The outer, approached by the narrow bricked passage that flanked the house, was fitted with wooden benches, on which a number of patients of both sexes sat waiting and talking to each other in querulous undertones. As soon as they became aware of Jonathan's arrival they fell suddenly silent, like starlings in a reed-bed at sunset.

The middle compartment was fitted as a consulting-room, with shabby bookshelves and sets of drawers, a weighing-machine, a placard of letters for sight-testing, a gynæcological couch upholstered in frayed American leather, a dental chair, and a big writing-table, littered with papers, certificate-forms, empty medicine-bottles, racks of test-tubes, writing-materials, a binaural stethoscope, and an old-fashioned microscope, more adapted for impressing the lay mind than for clinical use. The innermost compartment, through which Jonathan and Miss Hammond had entered, was a dispensary, surrounded by shelves full of bottles of heterogeneous shapes and sizes, with varnished labels, so yellowed by age and defaced by the dripping of their contents as to be illegible. Proceeding from this closed chamber the sharp, familiar smell of tinctures, antiseptics and aromatic medicaments filled all the rest with that air, so characteristic and yet undefinable, which is the odour of general practice.

The light in the dispensary was so feeble that Jonathan hesitated. He picked up a bottle and scrutinized the defaced label. "If I'm not careful, I shall poison somebody," he said.

"You needn't worry," Miss Hammond told him. "I do all the dispensing." She showed him a hatch in the partition. "All you need do," she said, "is to pass your prescriptions through here. Please try to write clearly, or I shall keep you waiting."

"Your father never told me," he said, "that he—we had a dispenser. You seem to find time for everything. I wanted to thank you for the flowers in my bedroom. Luggage, hot-water, chrysanthemums, dispensing . . . Is there anything you *don't* do?" he rallied her.

For answer she pointed to the chair behind the writing-table and pressed a spring bell, whose sound summoned the first of the waiting patients. Nothing but a faint flush on her pale cheek told him that the implied compliment had pleased her.

And so the evening's work had begun: the first of the innumerable evenings—and mornings and afternoons—which became, in their monotonous similitude, the substance of Jonathan's life for years to come.

One after another, responding to the ping of the bell, the patients entered. They were all of one class, diversified by fine shades of relative degradation or prosperity; for the private patients, who were comparatively few, claimed the privilege of being attended to in Dr. Hammond's front room and out of surgery hours.

Their clothes were the uniform clothes of the Black Country's working millions, diversified only by the individual odours of toil that clung to them. The women wore skirts and bodices of shoddy half-cotton, and printed aprons; rarely a woollen coat, more often a check shawl that served for the protection of head and shoulders together. The men wore coats and trousers of inferior cloth, industriously patched and darned and held together, in age, by the compost of grease and metal dust and pulverized carbon that infiltrated them. Around their necks, by way of ceremonial adornment, they wore cotton handkerchiefs, knotted or folded.

The apparel of men and women alike carried into the surgery's pungent antiseptic air reminders of the atmosphere in which they worked; machine shops, redolent of rancid mineral oils and metal filings, mine-workings, dank and acrid, close sculleries smelling of cooked food, old clothes, babies and soapsuds. Most of them had made, out of respect for their visit to the doctor, some pathetic attempt at a toilet, but even here their surroundings frustrated them. The men because it was the middle of the week went unshaven. The skin of the women's faces, though scoured with yellow soap, was sallow and greasy, starved of sunlight; its gross pores opened by labour, were clogged with particles of carbon that crowded the air they lived in, and their hands, which might once have been shapely, untended except in hurried intervals, looked as scored and calloused, as warped and distorted by toil, as those of the men—

which were no longer hands at all but merely hardened instruments of labour.

Even in the ailments which they submitted to Jonathan's opinion he found the same devastating uniformity, rigidly stereotyped by the nature of their work or their surroundings. In one sense of the word they were all occupation-diseases. Young women brought to him the anæmia of sunless workshops and sedentary imprisonment, scamped meals, cheap food, and the constriction of steel-ribbed corsets. The housewives showed him fingers poisoned by the splinters of worn floors, the mastitis of a motherhood too harassed for cleanliness, the heavier ills of too frequent and too hurried child-bearing, the chronic dyspepsia that came from their only stimulant, crude, stewed tea. The young men, for the most part, presented to him the accidents of their employment: crushed hands, cut heads, fragments of metal or flying sparks imbedded in their eyes. Their elders showed signs and symptoms more sinister, forerunners of decay: the wheezing of bronchitic tubes that resented the air of autumn; stout hearts, undermined by some attack of rheumatic fever neglected and forgotten in adolescence, beginning to lose the compensation with which nature had provided them, protesting at last, in puzzling, unrecognized danger-signals, against a continuation of daily stresses that they had bravely borne but from which, life decreed, they might never escape. He saw strong men, defeated by their own strength. He saw also weaklings, blighted by heredity,

made puny by the hardships of a slum childhood, whom the necessity of living had driven to a labour for which they were unfitted, finding solace at last, and not unreasonably, in the poison that Messrs. Astill, who knew the requirements of the market, provided for that purpose.

That evening, one by one, advancing to the summons of the little bell, they passed before Jonathan; and the causes of all their diseases were two only: ignorance and poverty. It was not in his power, sitting there at Dr. Hammond's writing desk, to remedy those causes. For the moment his mind was only concerned with treatment. He treated them, there and then, without waste of words; dressed wounds, sounded chests, wrote prescriptions for medicine and handed them through the hatch for Miss Hammond to dispense—much good might it do them! The good, as he knew very well, could never be bottled and labelled. It proceeded, essentially from himself—the young, incompetent practitioner whose strange face they regarded so anxiously, so doubtfully, so pathetically. It was his part to give them confidence, to supplement, by some mystical spiritual reinforcement which their bodies claimed from science (even as men's souls demand the reinforcements of religion) that invincible courage which is the most miraculous attribute of human nature.

Here, in this average, sordid evening of general practice, that courage was signally displayed. These ordinary people of the Black Country put all his philo-

sophies to shame by their acceptance of facts. There were few cowards or whiners among them. They wanted at all costs to know the worst; they had rarely known anything else; and they looked to him, with a trust that laid a heavy responsibility upon him, to tell them the worst, hoping, sometimes against hope, that it would not imply the abandonment of that labour which saved them from hunger. It was a curious relationship, at the same time exalting and humiliating; exalting because their trust demanded an equal return in candour and thoroughness; humiliating because it made him realize for the first time his own inadequacy. At the last ping of the bell, when no more patients were forthcoming, Jonathan felt that he had undergone an inspiring experience. He also felt that virtue had gone out of him, as perhaps it had. Flushed, and unreasonably triumphant, he joined Miss Hammond in the dispensary. She was tidying up the counter with methodical hands.

"No more? Is that the last of them?" She looked at the clock. "We're rather late to-night. That shows that winter is beginning. I expect you're ready for supper? We'd better begin without father."

"I'll put out the light," said Jonathan.

"Please don't. I'm used to doing it myself," she answered ungraciously. She was obviously used to doing most things herself.

## CHAPTER II

### ANCIENT HISTORY

THEY were half way through supper when Dr. Hammond returned from his case. He stood in the doorway for a moment unaware of Jonathan, a big-boned man, bowed and bent beneath the weight of his seventy odd years. He wore a pepper and salt coat, full-skirted, of the kind that prosperous farmers use for riding, a folded Ascot cravat secured by a horseshoe tiepin, and a tall square-topped felt hat which he neglected to remove. His clothes, indeed, seemed more suited to the practice of agriculture than that of midwifery; the black bag which he carried should have contained samples of oats rather than forceps. He stood there, a gaunt and grizzled figure, blinking at the light; the grey stubble on his lean jaw gave him a hungry, wolfish look; but his features, though shrunken and discoloured by the changes of age, showed traces of the nobility which Jonathan had noticed in his daughter's. He had the same straight, over-heavy eyebrows, the same firm, yet potentially passionate mouth, though the lips were thinned by age and of a bluish pallor. His face was that of a man mortally tired, not only by conscious exertion but by the unconscious struggle of a strong spirit battling with age. He stared at his daughter, and

she stared back at him without a word. Then he caught sight of Jonathan, and the tired eyes lightened suddenly.

"Hello! So you've arrived?" The tone showed relief. "I hope Rachel's looked after you, huh? Been at it seven hours. A breach presentation, which I had to turn." Evidently Miss Hammond was not embarrassed by obstetric details. "No, don't get up, Dakers; stay where you are! No need to be formal in this house."

He certainly wasn't formal. He took off his hat, displaying a high narrow cranium, streaked with sparse black hair. Then, sinking into a chair at the fireside, he proceeded to remove his boots and put on his slippers, grunting and breathing heavily as he did so. Next, sharply, suddenly, he turned on his daughter:

"What about the evening surgery? Huh?"

"He took it," the woman answered, with a glance at Jonathan.

The old man gave a sigh; he rubbed his eyes and stretched out his lank shins to the blaze, while Rachel, moving silently, set at his side a small table with a plate of bread and cheese and a mug of greenish cider. Without a word of acknowledgment he began to eat and drink voraciously. The business absorbed him; he took no more notice of Jonathan. For a long while the three of them sat in absolute silence. At last, having finished, he pushed the table aside. As Rachel methodically and silently removed it, he turned to Jonathan. He spoke; his voice, though gruff, was low, and of a singular



charm. His eyes, though always challenging, were honest.

"Well, what do you make of Wednesford, Dakers?" he said.

Jonathan had not made very much of it. He liked the bridge over the Stour, the Queen Anne houses. Old Hammond was evidently not interested in architecture.

"H'm. Higgins's Buildings. The worst slum in the place," he grunted. "If Craig had a conscience he'd have condemned them years ago. The owner, George Higgins, is on the council and a patient of his. Those buildings are a plague-spot. Huh?"

The grunt sounded interrogative, so Jonathan proceeded:

"Then, on my way from the station I saw the Cottage Hospital."

The old man laughed grimly. "Hingston's Hospital. Huh?"

"It looks like a modern building."

"Built five years ago. Joe Hingston gave the money."

"You know that I'm keen on surgery; I was on the house with Lloyd Moore. I was wondering if you had a decent theatre and competent nurses."

"I've no idea," the old man snapped. "Never been there."

"You mean there's some difficulty—you are not on the staff?"

"Every practitioner in Wednesford's on the staff, *ex officio*. You've a right to use the Hospital if you want to. I've never done so. That's all."

Jonathan was nonplussed. "For any particular reason?" he enquired.

"For the best of reasons. Those damned Irishmen run it: Craig and Monaghan—they and that scoundrel George Higgins between them. It's their private preserve."

"But surely," Jonathan began, "if it's a public foundation . . ."

"Try it, my boy, try it!" Hammond laughed grimly.

"I will," said Jonathan.

The old man scanned him with an amused and bitter smile.

"You will? Huh? Very well. You don't know Craig. I do. I've had reason to know him."

Whatever his virtues or his vices might be, this Craig, their principal opponent, was evidently on the old man's mind. It almost sounded as though he were afraid of him. A man of his age and standing—for which Longmead had vouched specifically—should be afraid of nobody. There was something sinister in this evident obsession. Jonathan waited for further explanations, but none were forthcoming. The heat of the fire, which now glowed like a furnace, made him drowsy. The old man, already fatigued, began to nod asleep. The little room was possessed of a strange quiet, in which the ghostly Rachel, unperceived, had cleared the table.

Now she was sitting, darkly, mysteriously, in a corner, with folded hands. At no moment had she seemed so magnificently impassive. The somnolent compelling quietness that held them all began to get on Jonathan's nerves. He could not break it. This was no empty silence, but one thickly tenanted by inscrutable thoughts: the dreams of Dr. Hammond, whose left arm twitched as he dozed, like that of an old dog asleep; the dark, impenetrable thoughts of that strange girl; the eager, flaming ambitions, questions, aspirations, that surged like racing clouds through his own mind. The air was charged and quivering with these invisible waves. They bound his tongue as the weaving gossamer of the Lilliputians once bound Gulliver. He hoped that all evenings at Wednesford would not be like this. Sooner or later, with some gigantic upheaval, he must free himself. A mechanism less amenable to spiritual influence, the gilt Empire clock on the mantelpiece, saved him by bursting suddenly into silvery chime.

Ten o'clock! The doctor woke with a start and stared around him; the girl, like another piece of clockwork, rose from her chair and disappeared, returning after a moment with a tray on which were a cut-glass jug of water, glasses, and a decanter of whisky. Once more she placed the table at her father's elbow, then, silently, kissed his forehead, murmured good-night to Jonathan, and retired.

Jonathan also was by this time ready for bed, and said so, with a yawn.

"What? You're not going?" the old man answered quickly. He poured out a third of a tumbler of whisky with his bony hand. The brief doze had restored him to a vigour that Jonathan had not suspected. His deep eyes shone; his wolfish, grizzled face had a new keenness.

"When I was your age," he said, "I was never in bed before two: life was too damned interesting to be wasted. Huh? And now," he went on, "I'm up late for another reason. Calcereous arteries don't take kindly to sleep. Four hours is about as much as they will allow me. Mix yourself a drink, Dakers."

He pushed the decanter towards Jonathan. Jonathan declined it. Since the night of his father's death he had foresworn whisky, mainly, he assured himself, for economical reasons.

"What? You won't drink?" The voice was a little scornful. "When I was your age . . . " He laughed. "No, no. You needn't be frightened. I'm not a tippler . . . now. Look at my hand!" He stretched the bony member forth without a tremor; then took a long gulp of whisky and smiled at Jonathan. "I'm afraid," he said, "I puzzled you more than a bit when we were talking of Craig and the Cottage Hospital this evening. Huh?"

There were things, Jonathan admitted, that would do with explanation.

"Well, well, I'll explain them now," the old man said. "There's a part of the business that I couldn't go

into with Rachel in the room. It concerns her mother—my wife. It's ancient history—and painful. However, sooner or later it has to be told, and there's no time like the present, huh?"

Jonathan agreed.

"Very well. It was forty years ago that I came to Wednesford. I was a big chap then; thirty-two, and six foot in my socks. I doubt if I'm five foot ten if you measured me now. Yes, over six foot, and I rode about twelve stone four. I'd played football for the London Hospital—Rugby, of course—and I held the inter-hospital heavy-weight boxing championship for four years. I was a big, strapping fellow, and didn't give a damn for anybody. Wild as a hawk! And, though I'm saying it, not so bad at my work. You can ask Lloyd Moore; he knew me well in those days. A good friend, Lloyd Moore. He wrote me about you, by the way. Huh?"

By this time Jonathan realized that the grunt demanded no reply. Hammond continued:

"I bought this practice from a fellow named Bartlett who's been dead these thirty years. There wasn't any opposition in Wednesford at that time. Nor room for it: the mining developments hadn't begun. It was a good mixed practice. There were several big houses: old-fashioned country gentlefolk—the word's gone out of fashion. Huh?—whom the coal hadn't driven away. I had a good sporting life; make no mistake about it! Why, I've shot snipe within a mile of this house. And

the people liked me.” His eyes challenged Jonathan to dispute it. “I understood them, and they understood me.

“A good life, did I say? Well, I don’t take that back. It was rather a rackety life, if you like to put it that way. We drank a lot more in the sixties, but the liquor was better. We drank hard and we lived hard, and I’ll be damned if it hurt us. Look at me now! Not so bad for seventy-two! Huh?

“I forgot to tell you: when I came here I wasn’t married. An eligible bachelor, with a strong taste for women. That was what let me in for my first mistake. Seven years after I settled here I married a local girl. She was a fine woman to look at—a dark, big girl like Rachel, though that’s about all the two of them had in common. She’d been brought up with her people in Wednesford—never been out of it. Her father, old Josiah Higgins, though he’d made a pot of money out of the foundry—you saw it to-day at the bottom of the hill, opposite The Pack Horse—didn’t believe in education. He’d had none himself. Why should he? However, he had his ambitions, Josiah, and when I got mixed up with this girl he saw his chance. He’d always intended that Hilda should marry a gentleman, and, by God, when she married me she got one of a sort.” He chuckled grimly.

“Of course, it went all right at first. However much you may have knocked about, marriage is different. I began to think I’d done a fine thing for myself—settled

down, and all that. I didn't realize that half Wednesford was grinning at me; they knew better than I did the trick that old Josiah had played on me. Of course they were quite polite about it: people are. But they knew what I didn't know about Hilda and the Higgins family. Josiah could have forced half a dozen of his men to marry her if he'd had a mind to.

"It took me six months to realize what a hash I'd made. Then I could have shot myself. The people I'd mixed with couldn't stomach my wife. No blame to them. If I hadn't been a fool, I couldn't have stomached her myself. But there it was. If I'd gone into North Bromwich and picked up a woman off Queen Street I couldn't have done worse. When you know George Higgins, you'll see what my wife was like. Only George is a slimy devil, without a spark of Hilda's generosity, loose though she was. No, Hilda was an angel compared with her nephew George.

"Of course all this hell went on beneath the surface. I wasn't going to admit that I'd been caught. Even if my friends couldn't stick my wife, they still trusted me. I don't think my marriage lost me any of my practice. Though the older families were beginning to move away from here; new ones, of another kind, like Joe Hingston's, kept coming in. And when Hingston's pits were opened the working-class population doubled itself in a few years. They said that Wednesford was going to be another Wolverbury. All the tradesmen who'd been looking to go bankrupt for years began to blossom out

into gigs and build new houses and stuck up conservatories. Of course I got my share of the boom. Rather too much of it: more work than I could handle. I didn't mind that. I worked like a convict, day and night; it took me out of myself—and away from my wife.

"By that time I'd reached a point when I couldn't look at her. It poisoned everything. I was raking in a devil of a lot of money; but it didn't make me any happier. That was one thing worth learning; money never does. I'd always been a bit haphazard in money matters; I suppose I always shall be. You'll find that out. I lent a lot of it, and I lost a good bit on horses—which comes to the same thing. And Hilda was as bad a manager as myself. I didn't mind: she could spend as much as she damned well pleased so long as I didn't have to look at her. It was partly that, and partly the overwork that made me drink. Huh?

"Yes, that's the skeleton in my cupboard, Dakers. You needn't worry about it: I'm all right now, and have been for near on twenty years. You needn't look forward to putting me to bed in my boots. Thank God it wasn't drugs. I drank because I had to. Drank like a fish! And yet it made no difference. People had got used to me; they trusted me, drunk or sober. It made no difference at home, either. My wife was drinking too . . . "

He stopped. His brow became suddenly furrowed; his eyes glared at Jonathan under the straight, shaggy brows.



"Dakers," he said, "have you ever gone to bed with a drunken woman? You haven't? Well, take my advice: if ever you do, take care that you're drunk too. When I was sober I remembered what she had been to me. It was just about this time that Rachel was born. I used to think it 'ld have been a good thing if both of them had died—which shows you how easy it is to make mistakes. Rachel's an angel. You'll take a long time to know her—you can sum me up in five minutes, but when you *do* know her . . . However, that's by the way.

"Where was I? Ah . . . work. Yes, yes. It was getting too stiff for me. I had a sort of breakdown, the first in my life. I saw my old pal Lloyd Moore. 'My dear Hammond,' he said, 'you must get a partner.' Of course I knew he was right. I should have done it before. I advertised. The money side of it didn't trouble me; money never has. And so Craig came along."

"Craig?" Jonathan repeated, starting. "You don't mean the Craig that's here now? I had no idea . . ."

"Craig. That's the chap. There's only one of them in the world, thank God; and that's one too many. Charles Butcher Craig: that's his name, and if ever the devil was made flesh, that's the label he's taken."

He lifted a bony forefinger and shook it in Jonathan's face.

"Let's start fair," he went on. "I want you to imagine what I was twenty years ago. A great big chap, fifty-

two and strong as a horse, a pretty fair sportsman and a middling good doctor. The people had got used to me. If ever I'd let them down it was out of ignorance, not out of carelessness or shirking trouble, and they knew it. I'd never, as far as I know, done a bad turn to anyone but myself. I'd been trapped into a rotten marriage and made a mess of my life in trying to escape from the consequences. I'd made money, and chucked it away in handfuls like a fool. But in spite of all this, there was nothing mean about me. This isn't boasting: I happened to be made that way. I never suspected anyone; that's about the sum of it.

"And I didn't suspect Craig. Why should I have suspected him? The fellow was a gentleman—he spoke my own language. He was a good sportsman, as far as I could see. Keen on his work, and fifteen years more up-to-date than myself. Energetic, sober, good-looking . . . What more could you want? An Ulsterman, half Scotch, half Irish. Sandy hair—it's grey now—and a sort of brogue that people liked to listen to. When he first came along I treated him candidly, just as I'm treating you. I told him the worst; that was only fair to him; I let him know exactly how things stood, and what he was taking on. We shook hands on it. I felt that I'd struck my first patch of luck in years: a man I could trust with anything.

"‘What you need, first of all,’ he said, ‘is a decent holiday. If I were you, Hammond, I should go away on a six months' voyage.’ He had a friend in a shipping

company in Liverpool, and fixed that up for me. He was remarkably generous about money. All that I earned at sea—and that was damned little in those days—would be paid into the practice, and I was to get my half share of the total just the same. My wife and the baby went back to old Josiah's at the foundry. Craig got a housekeeper, and took possession of this place.

"I was away five months. No doubt it was good for me, though life at sea was a dull job for an active chap like myself. I didn't shake off the drink entirely; that wasn't to be expected; but when I came back here, I was another man. I'd got back my confidence, if nothing else. And yet, when I found myself in the old surroundings, with my wife settled in again and going on in the same old way, it all came back on me; things didn't look much more cheerful than when I'd left. The people were glad to see me; that was one consolation; some of them seemed to have missed me."

He laughed: "Not many, though. By that time Craig had worked himself pretty well into the practice. Partly, of course, the new broom. But it wasn't only that, mind! Craig was a conscientious worker and sound professionally. He didn't make friends with the working-class patients, as I had done; but there was something steady about him that made them trust him. As far as the clubs were concerned the practice increased automatically; there was no stopping it. But Craig was more ambitious than me. He managed to get back some of the better people whom I'd lost when I married.

He wasn't saddled with an impossible wife; he hadn't a reputation for drinking; he had good manners and what you'd call a manner. And then, besides, he was an eligible bachelor, which counts for a lot with mothers. Just about that time the Wolverbury golf-club was started. Craig was a scratch player, and that brought him in contact with a lot of the folk who'd taken the place of my old hunting set. The fellow found time for everything. He has only one weakness that I know of. He was born a gambler, and will always be one. Stocks, shares, horses . . . I like a flutter myself, but Craig made a business of it. In every damned thing he was businesslike. My books were all in a muddle. I'd got one of Josiah's clerks to send out bills for me once a year. If people paid, well and good. If they didn't, it made no difference. I went on attending them just the same. As long as I had enough to live on I didn't mind. But Craig's book-keeping was as neat as everything else about him. He was a cold, systematic devil, Craig. Nothing would ever have turned me into a business man.

"And even if Craig wasn't exactly what you'd call chummy when I got back, I found him extraordinarily considerate. He took me for what I was, and I was grateful for it. He was always ready to do more than his share of the work. When my wife was giving trouble—when *I* was giving trouble, for that matter, he relieved me of everything. I began to feel that I'd fallen into a soft job.

"What was the truth of it? I didn't know then, but I know now. He'd begun it during the time when I was away, suggesting to everybody—it never went beyond suggestions—that I was down and out; correcting my diagnoses in such a way as to let people imagine that I'd made mistakes, and pretending to shield me; hinting at the horrors—well, it *was* bad enough—of our life at home; making patients thank their stars that they'd got a sober, up-to-date doctor in my place at last.

"And when I came home he went on with the same game. Old patients would ask for me. Dr. Hammond was a bit off colour, he'd tell them. And he'd say it in such a way that they believed I was drunk, and he, kind friend, was protecting my reputation. When accidents or night-calls came he'd give the same impression. He'd come in to me, all kindness and consideration and respect, and persuade me that he wanted to save an older man from unnecessary exertion. The new people stared at me when I went about. All that they knew of me they'd gathered from Craig's hints. Most of the old ones, who had reason to like me, stuck to me; but even they were too anxious not to hurt me to tell me of the rumours that Craig sent flying round. In a way they were right. I was a damned fool in any case. Right up to the end I trusted Craig implicitly. If anybody had suggested that he was working against me I should have flown in their faces. They showed their sense in not risking it.

"Then came the first crash. A beastly business,

Dakers. I don't say that I wasn't partly to blame. After all, it was under medical orders that I'd gone on that voyage. Still, five months. . . . During that time when my wife went back with the child to old Josiah's, she got mixed up with a publican who kept the Pack Horse opposite. Like to like! If ever there was a swine that fellow was one. It took me ten months to discover what was notorious. Even when she came back to this house with me she was still carrying on with him. Craig knew that as well as anybody. But not a word! . . . Not a word!

"A dirty business. I won't go into details. God knows, if I'd ever owed Hilda anything the debt had been paid. I filed my petition. It was a clear case of adultery. Old Josiah, who was a pillar of the Baptist Church and a damned scoundrel, had money to fight me with. I was accused of cruelty and misconduct with one of my patients. I'd not been a saint—don't imagine it!—but I'd drawn the line there. Still, I had to prove it, and that meant dragging a heap of dirty linen into court. Craig was most sympathetic. He was ready to hold the fort while I was in London. He was always only too glad to get me out of sight.

"In these days people don't think much of divorces, public opinion's more reasonable; but eighteen years ago, in the Black Country, divorce came next to murder. The witnesses brought back stories. All the Higgins evidence that I'd disproved was taken for gospel here. No doubt my friend Craig did his bit with it. The law

expenses were enormous—enormous for me, I mean, because I'd never saved a penny, and couldn't recover anything from the publican.

"I came back from London. I was a broken man. And that was the moment that Craig chose to turn on me! Of course he'd prepared for it, and was only waiting his chance. He accused me of taking money and not accounting for it—defrauding him, in other words. It's quite possible that he was right. I've told you that I was always careless about money. His system of book-keeping was too complicated for me; what's more, he had always encouraged me not to bother about it. I trusted him, and I knew that he had no reason not to trust me. Still, there I was, down and out, with a dog's reputation and broke to the world. He couldn't have chosen a better moment to drop on me. And he did so to some purpose, I can tell you! Of course I fought it. I had no alternative. Irregular I may have been, but I wasn't a swindler. London again! I was getting used to the law-courts. You can imagine how it went. Craig, smart as paint, businesslike, definite, respectable, telling his lies like clockwork. And me—broken, crushed, a wreck on my beam ends, stung pretty nearly to madness by his lying! Why, in God's name, should anybody be expected to believe *me*?

"Craig won. In his summing-up the judge was pretty rough on both of us; but that part of the case never came to Wednesford. All that the people here knew was that I'd lost, and was going bankrupt. It was lucky,

they said, that the case had been a civil one. The costs and the verdict cleaned me out of my last farthing. The partnership dissolved automatically. Craig took the public appointments and the bulk of the practice. He'd been preparing the ground for that a year before—ever since he set foot in Wednesford—and he's got them still.

"Of course he set up on his own, in opposition to me. Then he married money. That was another part of his plan. Listen to me, Dakers! From that day to this I've been fighting my way back. From that day to this I've never once been drunk. At last, after eighteen years, I'm just about where I was—in the practice, I mean—when Craig joined me. But I'm an old man. A long job like the one I've had to-day knocks me out. I know that if I go on much longer, as I've got to for Rachel's sake, I shall begin to lose ground or crock up altogether. That's why I decided to ask Longmead to find me another partner. I hadn't looked forward to it, I give you my word; but as soon as I set eyes on you I liked the look of you. That's being candid. And that's why I've put all the cards on the table to-night. You know the worst of me, anyway."

He stopped, and closed his eyes. The long story had tired him. Once more he was the grizzled, weary figure who had entered the room two hours before. In the silence that followed Jonathan pitied him.

"I'm glad that you've told me all this," he said at last. "If I had known it. . . ."



"You wouldn't have come here? Huh?" the old man broke in quickly. "Perhaps I was wrong not to have told you before. Let's be frank, Dakers; if there are any doubts in your mind we'll tear up the agreement. As for the time that you've lost. . . ."

He rose to his feet; his gaunt, bowed shoulders loomed over Jonathan.

Jonathan shook his head.

"No, no. That's not what I meant. If I had known all this I should have been all the keener to come here."

The old wolf laughed suddenly and held out his hand. Jonathan took it and clasped it solemnly. He felt that he was shaking hands with a completely honest man; an unusual experience.

"You needn't fear," old Hammond said, "that the bargain's a bad one. Longmead's a good adviser to young people, if only for business reasons. He wants your trade. Quite apart from that, the terms are easy, and the opening's a good one. If you're prepared to work and to fight—for you'll have to do both, huh?—there's no reason why you shouldn't beat Craig and Monaghan on their own ground. In spite of all that's happened the people respect me. I know them, and Wednesford, backwards. That's worth something to you. Besides, though I say it myself, there's some fight in me still." He held out his hand again: "Good-night, my boy." His smile was a brave one, the keen eyes almost beautiful.

Jonathan went slowly upstairs. That first night in

Wednesford was a restless one for him. Hour after hour, with eyes wide open, he lay and pondered this story of folly, betrayal, disgrace and rehabilitation. The work which he had undertaken as a matter of business seemed, in the light of these revelations, to have taken on the colour of a righteous cause. This old man, weak though he might have been, had been gravely wronged. He and his daughter were lonely figures, demanding loyalty, protection, generosity. These three he would gladly give them. But what more? That day the soul of Jonathan was in a mood for giving. All through the still night, ceaselessly, he heard the thunder of Hingston's rolling-mills; the vast, far sighs of furnaces, the sounds of metal that shrieked as if in pain. The air that he breathed was permeated by a hot acridity and by the odour of yellow chrysanthemums.

His thoughts went back, not to the dark enigmatic girl whose hands had placed them there, but to the autumnal lawns of Silver Street; the harvest moon and Edie, pale, mothlike beside him.

## CHAPTER III

### ROUTINE

JONATHAN's working day at Wednesford began early. At five o'clock precisely the steam-siren in Hingston's steel-works at Wolverbury blew out its mournful summons over the sleeping land, penetrating the dusky ground-mist which clings to the midland plateau in winter with huge reverberations of a sustained minor third, like the first, fateful chord of *Nun hast du mir den ersten Schmerz getan* in Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*. Even when he slept Jonathan was aware of it. This triad, so mellow, so melancholy, so long drawn out, was not merely the first chord of an overture; it was the leading motive with which, in memory, he associated all his early days at Wednesford. That chord, and, just as subtly, the odour of chrysanthemums, permeated with vibrations of sound and scent the particular cells of his sensorium which imprisoned the record of this experience and all its associations, so that he could never hear the one or smell the other without returning, in spirit, to the back bedroom at Dr. Hammond's.

It was a comfortable sound. It assured his sleeping mind that two more hours would pass before his body had need to brave the bitter morning air. Its summons was succeeded by forty others of varying pitch and in-

tensity, from the bass tones of the "bull" at the Mawne Furnaces, bellowing out of the darkness beyond the Fatherless Bairn ridge, to the urgent shriek of the whistle in Higgins's foundry, half a mile away. Sometimes as he lay there, half conscious, he could imagine the basin of the Black Country as a fog-bound estuary in which great liners and tramps and squealing tug-boats were groping their way, nervously, toward some unimaginable harbour.

At seven o'clock Ada marched in with his tea and shaving-water. Ada Hollis was Hammond's maid-of-all work, whose weekly night-out had coincided with Jonathan's arrival. She came of a swarming family that lived, or rather pullulated, in the picturesque slum called Higgins's Building which had struck Jonathan's imagination on that first night. She was a typical product of the Black Country, sturdy, blonde, untidy; yet, desperately clean. Her arms were red, her blotched face shiny with energetic scrubbings of household soap. There was no time of day or night in which she was not cheerful; and that grey hour of the morning found her with thick loins girded for the unending combat with soot which was the principal preoccupation of herself and of her mistress.

By eight o'clock Jonathan was downstairs and ready for breakfast. In the Victorian living-room a fire burned fiercely: in Wednesford coal was cheap. He breakfasted, often by gaslight, alone with Rachel Hammond; for the old man's five hours of sleep were usually

prolonged into daylight. They ate, as a rule, in silence. Not because that strange girl's dark heaviness weighed more ponderously at this hour of the morning—indeed her placidity was unvaried—but because the intimacy which made her anticipate his movements and desires in every detail of domestic or professional life was not extended to purely personal matters. Her silence was habitual. Even after three months at Wednesford, during which Jonathan had become more dependent on her than he realized, she hardly addressed a word to him that was not connected with the business of the day.

Never for one moment could he penetrate the thoughts that lay behind her sombre and sometimes beautiful mask. Even in professional matters she was sparing of words. As soon as he passed beyond them she became monosyllabic, wilfully stupid, even antagonistic. It was almost as if she were afraid that he would take liberties with her, though, in point of fact, he was merely wanting, for her sake, to penetrate her loneliness, and for his own, to find some point of human contact with her. Even when he found her reading—and she read much—she would close her book whenever he approached, as though she were jealous of her thoughts' secrecy. Although he was dependent on her not only for his creature comforts, to which she ministered with quick and perfect understanding, but also for his knowledge of the practice's mechanism, which she carried at her fingertips, Jonathan was far more intimate with the servant-girl Ada, whose goodwill and good-humour

threw wide the gates of her honest, uncouth heart, than ever with Rachel.

Long before they had finished breakfast the spring-bell on the waiting-room door announced the arrival of patients. When, followed by Rachel, in her white apron and over-sleeves, he reached the consulting-room, in which Ada, at some inconceivably early hour, had lighted the stove whose thin, black, tubular chimney radiated heat and a smell of hot iron, the outer chamber was usually full.

For the most part the "morning surgery" was devoted to the club-patients who constituted the greater part of the practice. The clubs, small game which Craig's ambitions had neglected to seize, had, most of them, stuck to old Hammond. When he said that he understood the Wednesford working-men he had not been boasting. The old man had served their clubs faithfully and had been made an honorary member of some of them: the Rationals, the Foresters, the Free Gardeners, the Royal and Ancient Order of Buffaloes—even, with an irony that nobody seemed to have noticed, the Rechabites, a scanty, semi-religious society whose regulations bound them to Total Abstinence.

For four or five shillings a year, paid quarterly, the members of these societies were supplied, and honestly supplied, with medical attendance and medicine, and the multi-coloured certificates that enabled them to draw sick-pay when they were "on the box." Apart from the ordinary casualties of labour, most of them suffered

from the infirmities of age: Bad legs—the generic name for varicose ulcer; bronchitis, the legacy of the dank mid-land air; rheumatism, inoperable hernias, senile debility.

On Fridays, when the weekly pay certificates had to be signed, hordes of these broken pensioners descended on Jonathan. They waited patiently in the outer chamber, exchanging symptoms and football gossip, till the bell rang; then entered, with a sudden perhaps unconscious exaggeration of their limps, twinges and wheezings. They did not want treatment, though a bottle of tonic or cough-mixture was valuable as a theatrical property; the bulk of Jonathan's careful prescriptions were destined to enter the Stour by way of scullery-sinks. All that they wanted was the certificate of inability to work which would entitle them to the club-pay that most of them deserved. They were eager—quite unnecessarily eager—to convince the new doctor that they were worse than they seemed to be. As soon as the slip of coloured paper was signed, an air of thankfulness would overspread their faces; the exaggerated symptoms, unconsciously assumed, would unconsciously disappear. Their aspect became gay and careless; they realized with pathetic relief, that the new young doctor wasn't the dread inquisitor that he might have been; and when next they came they would greet him as an old friend.

Of course there were a number of frauds and malingerers, more plausible than the genuine invalids, among them. The type was new to Jonathan; in hospital practice, apart from claimants under the new Workmen's

Compensation Act against which Mr. Martyn had railed, the professional exploiter of Sickness Societies had rarely appeared. But the sharp ears of Rachel Hammond knew the names and voices of all these old soldiers; when Jonathan came to the hatch with his prescriptions, she would lean over to him and whisper a warning, merciless and precise, and Jonathan, thus fortified, would harden his heart, and perhaps refuse a certificate.

On the very first morning one of these refusals led to an ugly scene. The patient in this case, who had nothing whatever the matter with him, was a hulking puddler from Hingston's blast-furnaces at Wolverbury, who came in with symptoms that simulated sciatica and a strong emanence of Astill's Entire. He was a plausible and fluent malingerer, intelligently—or at least craftily—polite to Jonathan. Until his turn came he had been boasting loudly to the other patients about his racing pigeons and whippets. In Jonathan's presence he was as mild as milk; a decent, downright fellow disappointed at being unfit for work.

"I bain't a mon to jag up without good reason, gaffer. I conna' abear to lose the brass, and that's straight. It's the craump that must have cotched me, bost it! when I was lifting the pigs. Now I bin all croodled up in the loins, and dussent move a leg forrats for the kench it gives me. It's a lickier for me, this is! Ye mote gie'us a stificate for the club, that's all I want, gaffer. I dae' want to mucker about wi' no physic. A week on the box'll do me."



But Rachel knew him. When Jonathan with a prescription of salicylates, came to the hatch, she was ready.

"That's Lisha Hodgkiss. An old hand. There's nothing the matter with him" she whispered. "Father knows it as well as I do; but Lisha usually gets his way with him."

Jonathan went back to the patient. "Stand up!" he said.

With a twinge of affected agony Hodgkiss straightened his leg.

"I cor' do it gaffer. The pain kenchés me here."

"Give me that certificate."

He did so. Jonathan tore it up before him. The big man went red.

"Get out of this," said Jonathan.

"What are you up to, gaffer?" said Hodgkiss angrily. "Yo'm club doctor, bain't yo, in ode Hammond's room? I cor' move: I got my rights and I'm going to have them."

"Get out of this!"

An intense silence had fallen on the waiting-room. All the old crocks were bending forward in their places, listening. A baby, frightened by the raised voices, began to cry. The big man regarded Jonathan narrowly, as though he were calculating his strength. He moved round the table to Jonathan's side; his limp had disappeared.

"Look here, boss, I want my rights. Yo'm going to

give me that stificate. What do I pay into the club for? That's what I ask you!"

Jonathan went on writing out his visiting list. Lisha, encouraged by his silence grew louder.

"Wheer's the ode man?" he shouted. "Wheer's Hammond? He'm ower club-doctor: he's no right to put a youngster like you in his room. If yo' dae' out with that stificate I'll complain to the secretary. If yo' dae give it me I'll bost your bloody young head for yo.'" He squared up to Jonathan threateningly. The flood of foul language, once released, flowed as from a syphon. Jonathan flushed purple. He knew that Rachel must be hearing. He rose to his feet; the height of the two men was equal.

"You'd better drop that" he said. "If you can fight you can work. Get out, right away; or I'll put you out and hand you over to the police."

For a moment the possibility of violence hung in a balance. The big man's left shoulder went back. A blow was coming. Jonathan's right went up to counter it with an automatic, technical correctness. Then something in the nervous chain that connected Lisha Hodg-kiss's fuddled brain with his fists went snap. He turned and slouched out rapidly, dripping obscenities as he went, pausing at the end of the cowed waiting-room to shake his fist at Jonathan and say that he'd get justice over the way from Craig.

The outer door slammed behind him. Jonathan rang his bell. The next patient entered; a dozen others,

including the baby and its mother, followed. Jonathan dealt with them calmly; beneath that calm his mind was wildly excited; at once triumphant and disquieted. He knew he had made an enemy. Personal enmity scarcely mattered; but also, by his challenge, he had made Lisha Hodgkiss an example to the rest of the club patients and shown them that with him they couldn't now expect the complaisant laxity that old Hammond's feebleness had led them to expect. A weak club doctor was always popular; and popularity, in these first days, was what Jonathan needed most. He even began to doubt if he had acted fairly in disbelieving Lisha Hodgkiss's symptoms. Supposing that the man were really in pain? Supposing he did go to Craig, and Craig discovered something serious?

The devil of it was that he couldn't get the least inkling of what the other club-patients had thought of this scandalous scene. They were all of them curiously silent and subdued; they approached him as if, indeed, he were an inquisitor, pledged to convict them of fraud. In spite of his big body and the determination he had just shown, Jonathan was doubtful of himself and curiously timid. He felt that he had made a bad beginning. Other malingerers, hearing Hodgkiss's complaints, would be quick to spread news of the newcomer's harshness and injustice. The rest wouldn't realize that he had merely been protecting their hard-earned funds. At any rate, he consoled himself, he had saved the ears of two women—Rachel, and the mother

of the squealing baby—from the contamination of Hodgkiss's foulness. When the surgery-hour was over he apologized for having let her hear so much. She stared at him in momentary amusement, then broke into one of her rare laughs:

"Language? I didn't even notice it; I'm used to that. Bad words don't mean anything here; they're just the way of speaking. But I'm glad you dealt with Lisha. I've been wanting father to do that for a long time. It isn't that he hasn't the courage" she explained; "only, when you get to his age, things don't matter so much as they do to us. The way of least resistance, you know."

She hushed her voice; for as she spoke the old man entered. At that time of the morning he always looked curiously unsubstantial; his features were drawn and frosty, as though his tenuous vitality, suspended in sleep, had not yet recovered itself, nor the feeble blood had time to flow back into his skin. The fact that Jonathan undertook the morning surgery was the greatest relief that the partnership had given him.

Jonathan told him of his encounter. For a moment Hammond looked grave. "I only wish," he said, "it had been someone else rather than Lisha Hodgkiss. That man's got a lissom tongue, as they say in these parts. He's a public-house politician, and one of the club-committee too. On the whole I shouldn't have chosen him for an enemy." He rubbed his hoary chin with a doubtful finger. "However, what's done can't

be mended. If he chooses to fight, we'll fight him. At any rate it'll show them that we aren't dead yet."

"Father, you know he's been sponging like this for a long time," Rachel broke in. "If anyone's to blame, I am. I told Dr. Dakers. I'm sick of all this humbug," she went on passionately. "They've begun to think they can do what they like with us!"

Before Jonathan could assure her that he was grateful she was gone like a black whirlwind. Old Hammond began to hum softly, tapping time with his fingers. He looked so bewildered and pathetic, the fire of the night before had so completely died down in him, that Jonathan almost wished that Rachel had kept her habitual silence.

"Will Hodgkiss go to Craig as he threatened?" he asked.

"To Craig?" the old man asked dreamily. "No, I don't think so. If he does, it won't matter. Sooner or later there's bound to be a clash between Craig and you. A *casus belli* (he gave the vowels the English pronunciation which still clings to Latin words in medicine) is never the real cause of war. Huh?"

He stood at the window, staring at the brick wall of the surgery passage, and Jonathan, who had no wish to waste time, recalled him to the compilation and apportioning of the visiting list.

Although the midland winter had set in, the list was still a short one, and the population of Wednesford so crowded into a small area that Jonathan, with his long

legs, could easily cover this round on foot. Craig and Monaghan, quite unnecessarily, shared a four-wheeled dogcart. Every morning when he set forth on his round, Jonathan saw this turn-out prowling up and down the road outside Craig's surgery with its bright bay horse and liveried coachman. For Craig had his surgery (his "office" he always called it) exactly opposite Hammond's, though he himself lived ostentatiously in a detached modern house with a big garden and two lawn tennis-courts in what Mr. Gaige, the auctioneer, who dwelt there himself, described as the "high-class residential neighbourhood" of the Wolverbury Road.

Not only did Craig live in that high-class neighbourhood: from the medical point of view he dominated it. Among all those "family residences" (Mr. Gaige again) occupied by the leading lights of Wednesford, the pillars of a variety of churches, the chairmen of local administrative committees, the masters of any number of factories of varying importance, from John Morse, the nailmaker, to young George Hingston, who inhabited the enormous gloomy square of stucco from which, on the wings of his baronetcy, his father (and, providentially, also Lady Hingston) had been translated to the rural splendours of Stourford Castle—among all these notable houses there was not one which, at the time of Jonathan's arrival, could legitimately be claimed by the Hammond practice.

It was from this world, in which big fees were not only not resented but actually welcomed and referred to

in public with a superior satisfaction, that Craig derived the bulk of his considerable income. The other working world of industrial Wednesford was relatively unimportant to him; but, having one foot already planted in it, he had determined to make the most of both.

For this reason, some nine months before, he had imported an assistant, later his partner, whose duty it was to carry the war into old Hammond's camp, and leave his chief free for wider and more important operations. Like Craig he was an Irishman; but, apart from a capacity for intrigue, they had little else in common. For though Craig retained in his armoury, and deliberately exploited, a brogue that his lady patients declared to be fascinating, his inner nature was more Scotch than Irish, combining, as Hammond said, the malignant qualities of both races without the virtues of either; while Monaghan, though subtle and adaptable to the other's colour, was not, at heart, ill-natured.

Their methods and even their outward appearance were consciously aimed at appealing to a large variety of people. Craig, as Jonathan saw him every morning driving down to the "office" in his four-wheeled dog-cart, was, incontestably, a superior figure. There was none of the easy-going haphazardness of the Black Country practitioner about him. He was always immaculately dressed and groomed; his pale face clean-shaven, his iron-grey hair and moustache carefully brushed. His speech, his movements, his very thoughts

seemed measured and deliberate, inspiring confidence. His smile, which had, by reason of the thick lips' coarseness and the unexpected revelation of long, prominent, equine teeth, a hint of cruelty in it, was always studiously controlled. He had never, as had old Hammond, allowed his speech to be modified by local usage. In whatever company he found himself he was always, unmistakably, a gentleman and something of a foreigner, a fact which flattered his female middle-class patients—whose husbands, for the most part, had made money recently, and who felt, in his presence, a vicarious gratification of their social aspirations—and gave to the poorer victims of his ambitious scalpel the satisfaction of feeling that their bodies were not entrusted to ordinary hands. A man, in short, of a commanding if sinister personality, which he had succeeded in impressing on the whole of the district.

In deliberate contrast, there was nothing whatever sinister about Monaghan. A red-haired young man from the county of Kerry, with plastic indeterminate features, a coarse skin, raw and blemished, an enormous mouth from which a smile was never absent, and an ingratiating brogue, entirely beyond his control, that gave an air of child-like irresponsibility to his blarney, his nature seemed to have been specially designed by Providence (and chosen by Craig) as a complement to his partner's studied reticence. If anyone felt an instinctive dislike to Craig—as sometimes happened—it was odds-on that they would fall to Monaghan, whose humble



origins enabled him to understand the psychology of the working-classes, and whose Celtic subtlety, refined by Craig's tuition, made him an amusing and flattering substitute for his partner in higher circles. Professionally, he had the competence of quick wits and nimble fingers. At the Rotunda, in Dublin, he had specialised in anæsthetics, which was one of the reasons why Craig had chosen him as partner in the ambitious designs which were to make Wednesford surgically independent of the North Bromwich hospitals.

For surgery, as Craig knew well, was the most paying of all branches in his profession; and though he belonged, like Hammond, to an era in which it was rarely handled by the general practitioner, and had none of the qualifications that would have justified his practising it, Sir Joseph Hingston's munificent foundation of the Cottage Hospital had given him the chance of attaining, by a series of operations on the vile bodies of his club-patients, which had, in the beginning, the nature of experiments, the rudiments of a modern surgical technique. This passion for surgery was—after those for racing and for social distinction—the ruling motive in Craig's well-ordered life. So far he had never had to fear a rival in Wednesford, and that was why Jonathan's advent was watched so keenly from the windows of the surgery opposite.

"I suppose, as a matter of courtesy, I shall have to call on Craig and Monaghan?" Jonathan asked the old man on the morning after his arrival.

A faint flush reddened Hammond's frosty cheeks; there was no end to his grudge's depth and bitterness.

"You must do as you like" he said. "I can't stop you, huh?"

"If I don't, they'll be able to say that I started by being hostile. I think, on the whole, I'd better get it over."

He had already fortified himself with Rachel's approval.

"You must do as you like" the old man repeated stubbornly.

Not another word could Jonathan drag from him. All that Hammond could bring himself to say on the subject, he had said, once and for all, in their first midnight colloquy. The very sound of Craig's name made him restless and jumpy, so Jonathan said no more, but as soon as the old man had slouched off on his round, a bent and gaitered figure moving with downcast eyes, he crossed the road to where Craig's shining equipage stood waiting.

The coachman, who had already guessed who he was, saluted Jonathan cheerfully. Unheeding of Olympian feuds, he regarded Jonathan as a colleague in the trade. In a dim, comfortless waiting-room, at the foot of a flight of stone stairs, a number of workmen, of a type superior to the generality of his own patients, surveyed Jonathan with marked suspicion. It was part of Craig's policy to make consultation with himself a privilege.

"Anybody upstairs with the doctor?" Jonathan asked.

The patients shook their heads gloomily. Jonathan climbed the stairs and knocked. He heard an irritable murmur of protest from Craig; then steps moved to the door, and Monaghan opened to him.

"Good morning" Jonathan said, "I've come to call on you." They stared at him in amazement. "From Hammond's, over the way," he added. "My name is Dakers."

Monaghan's face became instantly wreathed in smiles: a slow grimace twitched aside Craig's heavy moustache to reveal his horse-like teeth.

"Come in, come in! Do take a chair now!" said Monaghan with exaggerated heartiness. "We's after speaking of you this very moment. Talk of the angels!"

"I heard" said Craig, in measured tones, "that Hammond was getting in an assistant. It was just about time; the old man's nearly done for. I don't expect you'll find the work very heavy. Apart from the clubs, of course. They're a great bore. Do you happen to know the Black Country by any chance?"

"I'm a North Bromwich man" Jonathan told him.

"Oh, well, in that case. . . ." Craig left the sentence unfinished; but his tone expressed for that celebrated school a contempt that nettled Jonathan.

"As a matter of fact I've bought a share in the practice" he said.

"Really?" There was more pity than surprise in

Craig's voice, but his coarse mouth and the steel-blue eyes hardened.

"Is . . . that . . . so? Welcome, welcome!" said Monaghan in a gay crescendo. "The more the merrier! Plenty of room for everybody!" He seized Jonathan's hand with an innocent, impulsive, heartiness. "Well, that's good hearing!"

"Good hearing for Hammond's patients anyway," Craig put in drily. He offered Jonathan a cigarette. He himself smoked continually, with a long ivory holder that saved his carefully manicured fingers from stains. "I'm afraid" he went on "that you won't find the remnants of Hammond's practice very profitable or entertaining. Of course I don't know what you're expecting, or what your interests are."

"My principal interest is surgery," Jonathan answered shortly.

Again Craig's lips and eyes narrowed. Monaghan gave a jump, then quickly recovered himself.

"Good man!" he said "Splendid! Splendid! We've something in common!"

A glance from Craig suppressed him. Then, once more, the set mouth smiled cruelly.

"Surgery?" Craig slowly repeated. "Hammond does no surgery. Luckily. . . . In any case, you know, there isn't much surgery to be done in a place like this."

"What about the Cottage Hospital?" Jonathan said innocently.

"Hammond has never used it in my recollection. Of

course there's a theatre of sorts. But on the occasions when I've used it I've always had to provide the surgical equipment myself. I've found that an expensive hobby, I may tell you."

If this were the truth, it was a heavy blow to Jonathan.

"Is there no chance of the committee fitting it up?" he said.

"The committee?" Craig gave an ugly laugh, pressing his advantage. His eyes had seen Jonathan's face fall; he guessed, to his great satisfaction, that this interloper had no money. "The Committee?" he repeated. "My dear sir, I'm on it myself"—it was true in spirit, if not in fact—"and I know how they stand. The place is supported by voluntary subscriptions; trade is slumping, as you'll soon discover; the Committee's on its beam-ends; it can hardly afford to pay for the nursing staff, and as for equipment or instruments. . . ." He removed his cigarette, methodically, from its holder, and sat with the ivory tube clenched between his yellow teeth, smiling at Jonathan. "By the way" he went on, "have you taken any special surgical qualification?"

"Unfortunately no. I was reading for my fellowship when"—Jonathan hesitated—"when I decided to come here."

"Ah, yes," Craig murmured sympathetically, but with evident satisfaction.

"On the other hand" Jonathan went on, "I've done

a good bit of surgery, I was house-surgeon to Lloyd Moore."

The great name did not produce the effect that he had intended.

"Lloyd Moore?" Craig repeated, with a slight wrinkling of the brows. "Of course, Lloyd Moore of North Bromwich. I'm a London man myself, and when I have consultations, I generally send to London for my consultants."

"Lloyd Moore's a great genius," Jonathan hastily affirmed.

"So everyone tells me," Craig admitted. Although he did not say so, he might well have added: "Lloyd Moore is not a gentleman." Which, in his sense of the word, was perfectly true. However, a pupil of Lloyd Moore's was someone to be reckoned with. In the same tone of patronising politeness, he continued his examination of Jonathan's possible assets.

"I gather" he said, "that though you come from North Bromwich you're more or less a stranger here?"

"I don't know a soul in Wednesford or in the district, except old Hammond."

"That's a pity" said Craig, meaning that it was anything but a pity. "Wednesford isn't exactly a social neighbourhood, and the older people here are—how shall I put it?—rather stand-offish. Your partner has"—again he paused—"somewhat isolated himself from—please don't think I'm snobbish—people of our own class."

"Of course, I'd forgotten," said Jonathan, who had been thinking, "I know George Hingston, although, as a matter of fact, I've not seen him for many years."

To be more precise he had not seen George Hingston since that children's party at Mawne when as Harold's champion he had blacked Ralph Hingston's eye.

"Ah yes," said Craig, quickly discounting this important connection. "Everybody in the North Bromwich district knows the Hingstons. Sir Joseph, when he lived here, was a patient of mine, and so is George. Do you happen to know his wife, the Eleanor Pomfret that was?"

Jonathan didn't.

"A charming woman," Craig declared, almost as if the fact of her not knowing Jonathan were an addition to her charm. "She comes of a very good family. As a matter of fact the George Hingstons don't entertain much, apart from the business people who come to the works."

It seemed for the moment as if there were no more information that Craig wanted to extract from him, so Jonathan, vaguely discomfited by their polite hostility, bade them goodbye.

"There's no need for you to hurry like this," said Monaghan, *faux bonhomme* to the end, as he opened the door and shook him warmly by the hand.

"By the way, Dakers," Craig called after him, "do you play golf?"

Jonathan told him he didn't.

"Ah, that's a pity," Craig murmured. Though whether it were a pity for himself or for Jonathan, he didn't specify.

Eager to be freed from these formal courtesies, and since his round took him, that morning, to the station end of the town, Jonathan seized the opportunity of paying his respects to the one remaining member of his profession in Wednesford, a man named Lucas, who had recently put up his plate, "squatted," as Craig would have called it, a few doors from the hospital.

In a mean house, permeated by the smell of cooking, he found Dr. Lucas still in his bedroom slippers, a picture of resignation and humility. He was a pale, plump, middle-aged man, whose voice and manner, both surprisingly cultivated, were as soft as his pallid, flabby tissues. His skin, his scanty hair and ragged moustache were yellowish white, like old ivory; their texture had the transparency of blanched vegetables sprouting in a cellar, the consistency of soft and fungoid growths. Claspings and unclaspings his bleached hands, he welcomed Jonathan with an unpleasant suavity.

"I don't think you need look on me," he said, "as a serious opponent. I am not ambitious, Dr. Dakers, like Craig and Monaghan. All I am looking for in Wednesford is a little employment to keep my mind engaged. That is why I didn't think it worth while to purchase a practice. As far as competition goes you may regard me



as practically retired. My health, unfortunately, is not what it might be—no, not what it might be . . . ”

Encouraged by Jonathan's silence he launched into a highly technical dissertation on his ailments, his appetite, his diet, and the comparative virtues of various proprietary drugs with samples of which he made assaults on his uric acid.

“But as far as my health permits,” he assured Jonathan, “I shall be only too happy to give you my friendly help, for what it is worth. I scarcely know your partner, Dr. Hammond: though everyone speaks of him with the greatest respect. I fancy that he may have resented my setting up in practice here without a formal introduction. Unreasonably, I think—because, as I've told you, I have no wish to be a serious opponent. My kidneys, you see . . . ”

And off he went again.

“You live very near the hospital,” Jonathan suggested, as soon as he could find a break in the flow of symptoms. “That must be very convenient. I suppose you use it a good deal?”

“I won't deceive you, Dakers,” Lucas answered. “I'll be frank with you. As a matter of fact I haven't used it at all. To tell you the truth Craig and Monaghan have not been very friendly. They seem to have established a sort of monopoly there. And I myself, being of a retiring and—why not be frank?—a timid disposition, have rather shrunk from any contact with them. Of course, for a young man like yourself, with the

future before you, the situation's entirely different. I gather that our friend Craig fancies himself a surgeon. That's all very well: surgery's a paying game. But I am sufficiently old-fashioned to think that it's a job for a specialist, not for a general practitioner. We have excellent hospitals and surgeons in North Bromwich, and I think that out of regard for our patients we should use them. Please don't imagine that I'm speaking ill of Craig. Our positions are so very different that nobody can accuse me of being jealous of him; though I must confess that his attitude toward me has not been—shall I say welcoming? However, as you can judge for yourself, I am not a fighter. All that I expect from my colleagues is a modicum of 'live and let live.' ”

“I don't think I agree with you about the Hospital,” Jonathan told him. “You see,” he confessed, with a smile, “I'm keen on surgery myself. I've done a good bit in North Bromwich, with Lloyd Moore, and Lloyd Moore thinks that a lot of the routine stuff that comes into hospital—hernias, appendices and things of that sort, to say nothing of acute cases that oughtn't to be moved, can quite well be dealt with in a place like this.”

At the prospect of opposition to Craig, Lucas's yellow eyes brightened. “Of course you are young and up-to-date,” he agreed. “Craig isn't. That's the difference. With a man like yourself, who has modern technique at his fingertips and reasonable confidence, the proposition's entirely different. The hospital will be ex-

tremely fortunate if you can manage to break through the monopoly. Under those circumstances, if I may be allowed . . . ”

“I want an anæsthetist,” said Jonathan, breaking in on his period. “All that I need to know is this. If I operate here, will you be willing to give anæsthetics for me? Hammond’s too old, and I’ve reason to suspect that Monaghan would rather I didn’t ask him.”

Lucas’s fingers clasped and unclasped themselves spasmodically.

“Of course,” he declared, “I’d be only too willing to help you, only too willing. But I’m afraid you don’t realize how frail a reed you would be leaning on. Naturally, in an emergency, I couldn’t refuse. But as a matter of routine . . . ” He hesitated. “My nerves, I’m afraid, would be certain to betray me. Only yesterday I took a reading of my arterial tension. When you’ve a moment to spare, I wish you’d confirm it for me. It’s a great comfort to feel that at last we have someone who’s competent and friendly. I can’t tell you, Dakers, what a relief it is to know that. There’s a new product”—he fumbled among a sheaf of advertisements—“a derivative of nitro-glycerine, a gradual vasodilator that I’ve been reading about. How stupid of me! I forget the name. I should like to know if you’ve had any experience of it. But I’m afraid I’m keeping you, wasting your time?”

He could not have described the situation more accurately. As far as anæsthetics were concerned Jonathan

realized that he had drawn a blank. And, on the whole, he was forced to admit that he was not sorry—not only because of Lucas's lack of confidence, which he suspected of being an affectation, but because the whole atmosphere of the man was curiously shady. As he bowed Jonathan out with spoonfuls of saccharine compliments and assurances that, in every conceivable way, he was at his service, his distaste for Lucas's flattering humility was more acute than the discomfort that Craig's and Monaghan's thinly veiled opposition had given him. With them, at least, he knew what he was fighting.

Old Hammond, to whom he recounted his adventures on his return, confirmed that impression. On Craig the old man made no comments. He had said what he meant to say, and there was an end of it. But the mention of Lucas brought wolfish gleams into his eyes.

"That damned white slug—that crawling bit of slime!" he cried. "Don't talk to me about Lucas! Friendly, was he? Huh? Friendly? I wouldn't soil my hands by touching him. There's not a bit of shady practice in Wednesford that he hasn't got his fat fingers in. All the false certificates: all the dirty compensation cases! He sails pretty close to the wind; some day he'll capsize. And then the sharks of the General Medical Council will have his blood—that is if he's got any blood in his pale fat body! I tell you, that man's a blackmailer and an abortionist. Infamous Conduct in a

Professional Respect . . . Huh? Don't talk to me about Lucas. Friendly, was he? Ask Rachel!"

And Rachel, darkly listening, smiled. She rarely smiled, this silent creature; but when she did, the effect was that of storm-lights beautifully illuminating the expanses of some lonely countryside. It was only in the early afternoon, when she and Jonathan retired together to the dispensary, leaving the old man to fall asleep over his newspaper with iron-rimmed spectacles tilted over his bony nose, that they were offered any chance of intimacy; and the intimacy of those hours, spent in an atmosphere of sharply aromatic or spirituous odours, was of a peculiar kind.

Long practice had made her a deft and expeditious dispenser. Old Hammond, for all his later slovenliness, had grounded her well in the precise and formal technique of her art. Although the arrangement of drugs and bottles conformed to no rational system that Jonathan could perceive, she knew her way among the chaos blindfold. The shelves were well stocked, there was nothing he demanded which couldn't, in some arbitrary corner, be found. And though the bottles were ancient and their labels often illegible from age, use, or disuse, they were always specklessly clean and shining. Rachel handled them with the swift, automatic decision of a typist whose familiarity with its vagaries enables her to humour and get the most out of a decrepit machine. And when she had compounded her mixtures from the prescriptions which the old man wrote

in formal unabbreviated Latin and a firm, precise hand that put Jonathan's formless scrawl to shame, she would wrap them in her white paper squares with a uniform longitudinal pleat, on which the patient's name was written in her round, childish script, seal them with an invisible dab of sealing-wax melted at the tiny gas-jet, and set them on the scoured counter in shining rows, as neat and spotless as a Guards' battalion on parade.

In the routine of hospital life the apothecary's craft is neglected; prescriptions are limited to a list of stock pills, powders and mixtures, known by their numbers, whose general utility has given them their place in a private pharmacopœia; and now that Jonathan had to prescribe for individual cases without the aid of this convenient series of combinations, he often found his memory at a loss for the doses of unusual drugs which it had acquired for the purpose of his examination in *materia medica* and then forgotten. Sometimes he would hesitate.

"Whatever's the dose of *Tinct. Strophanthi*?" he would murmur to himself.

"Two to five minims. The same as *Tinct. Aconiti*," she would reply.

"Good Lord! I thought it was five to fifteen," he would say. "You've saved me from being a murderer again!"

The knowledge, limited to the exigencies of her function but embracing the dosage of every drug upon those shelves, with which her mind was stored, was as exact

and well-ordered as the rows of white-wrapped medicines. It offered an extraordinary contrast to her father's part of the surgery, that welter of neglected dust and disorder beyond the pitch-pine partition in which Jonathan was expected to do his work.

"You see," she explained regretfully, "he has never allowed me to touch a thing in there. Everything is out of its place; but he says he knows where to find it all the same. The extraordinary thing is, I believe he does. But now it's got so bad that nothing but a fire would put it right again."

They stared together at this Augæan Stable.

"I must do something," said Jonathan. "Come along, just give me a hand, and if the worst comes to the worst I'll take the blame for it."

Between them they essayed this monstrous lustration. Jonathan took off his coat, and Rachel rolled up the sleeves of her dark blouse. They worked like two children, making a game of it, collecting the alluvium of unopened samples that post after post had deposited in out of the way corners; the drifts of papers, circulars, money-lenders' letters, messages that had once been urgent; unopened medical periodicals to which old Hammond subscribed, but which he never read; bills paid and unpaid, stubby cheque-counterfoils, grubby slips of visiting-lists and prescriptions, scribbled pencil notes, dog-eared sheets of ink-black blotting-paper, and even, imbedded in the nascent conglomerate, two cheques from patients, forgotten and unrepresented.

When they had thrust this documentary silt into the stove and sent it roaring up to set the chimney on fire, the more solid elements of the formation became visible: stained bottles and test-tubes coated with dust, from which the contents had evaporated leaving nothing but a rim of crystals; corroded pen-nibs, rusty forceps, scissors, scalpels; a silver pencil, which the doctor had lost six months before and on which Rachel pounced triumphantly; a pair of pince-nez with one lens cracked, which had suffered the same fate; lengths of drainage tube and catheters whose rubber had long since perished; thermometers, silver probes, a broken stethoscope, a duck-billed speculum, small jars of cat-gut sutures, curved needles, a hypodermic syringe, microscope slides with cover-slips adherent, and empty spools of zinc adhesive plaster. Into this rubbish Rachel dived with the acquisitive zeal of a street-urchin ferreting in a dust-heap. From time to time she cried out in triumph at the recovery of something mislaid long ago.

When they had finished their task and reduced the room to relative orderliness, they wiped their dusty hands and stood smiling at one another like successful conspirators. The hurried activity had brought a flush to Rachel's pale cheeks; her lips, which were usually so solemn, were parted, her dark hair, escaping from its strict coils, fell in a disorder that softened her glowing eyes and threw a shadowy bloom on her fine throat. As though to reveal its white contours, she threw back her head and laughed; the failing light gave her aspect a



wild and vivid magnificence in which her static beauty came suddenly alive.

"To think that we've done it!" she cried. "After all this time! I haven't enjoyed anything so much as this for years."

"You're easily pleased," Jonathan was on the verge of saying; but as the words came to his lips he hesitated, appalled by the melancholy truths that they implied, the drabness, the repression, the desolation of a life in which a task so sordid and so ordinary could constitute a remarkable pleasure, a life uncoloured by any passion stronger than its devotion to a mechanical task and to this sad old man; a friendless, loveless life, devoid of any of the ecstasies which youth and physical splendour had a right to demand; a life starved and thwarted of any legitimate expression but the meticulous compounding of medicines and wrapping of bottles! As he gazed on this momentary revelation of beautiful enthusiasm—for it was nothing less—he perceived that he was in his habitual danger of sentimentalizing the figure of Rachel Hammond; though if sentimentality were, as he believed it to be, a refusal to follow facts to their logical conclusion, he could hardly be called sentimental. To be candid, the logical conclusion would not bear thinking of; and so, with deliberate cowardice, he sought refuge from the incalculable danger in further action.

"If only," he said, "we could find another table of some sort that I could use for a desk, and put it over by

the window there, I shouldn't have to disturb your father when we are working together."

Rachel was still untiring. They found their table hidden and unsuspected beneath a mountain of old ledgers and case-books which dated from the days of Craig's partnership and Rachel's infancy; and there, in the slanting light of the opaline window, they set it up, with clean blotting-paper and pens and an inkpot and Jonathan's own binaural stethoscope and instrument-case, a kind of altar subsidiary to the great desk at which the old man sat.

"There now! What time is it?" she asked.

They had given no thought to time. It was half-past five, and old Hammond would be waiting for his tea. Without even waiting for Jonathan's thanks she disappeared, and when a few moments later he returned to the living room, where Hammond, refreshed by his doze and roused, as he always was at this time of day, to an astonishing interest and vitality, impatiently awaited them, Rachel reappeared with her dark hair bound back in its accustomed severity, as sombre, as silent, as demure and remote as though they had never shared in what, for the moment, had seemed a romantic and passionate adventure.

"I've been thinking," the old man said, "that you'd better fix up some kind of desk of your own in the consulting room, huh? In that case we shan't get in each other's way, and we'll be able to go on working together when a rush comes."

Then only did Jonathan and Rachel exchange a secret smile.

"We've done that already, Sir," Jonathan informed him. "Been cleaning things up a bit. I hope you won't mind."

"Oh, that's what you've been doing, is it? I wondered what you two young people were so long about. Huh?"

His keen eyes glanced from Jonathan to Rachel. There was more in that glance than Jonathan liked to see; an interest a little too sharply speculative. And though her features remained motionless he could not help seeing the blush that coloured Rachel's cheeks. Was it a blush or nothing more, perhaps, than a reflection of the fire that glowed so redly at the doctor's feet? If it were a blush . . .

"Good Lord!" he thought. "But this will never do! It may be my duty to bring colour into this young woman's life, but not into her cheeks!"

That was the end of it. Winter, as the old man had prophesied, was already beginning to swell the evening surgeries. In another half hour the waiting-room bell began its monotonous clamour, and when, at half-past eight, they returned to the living-room for supper, all remnants of the romantic atmosphere born under circumstances so unromantic had vanished. When Ada had cleared away the supper-things, Rachel retired with her book into a corner listening, perhaps, to the murmur of medical "shop" that passed between

Jonathan and her father, but never raising her eyes. She was still sitting there when Jonathan rose and bade them both a formal good-night.

The air that filled his little bedroom that evening was colder and danker than on the previous night. The twinkling pit-fires were blurred behind the mist that hid the stars. As he turned out the spluttering gaslight and settled into bed, Jonathan was tired; so many new impressions were stamped upon the surface of his brain; so many new trains of thought and action, leading towards ends unimaginable, had been started. As he lay there, his mind stimulated to keenness by the colder air, he began to think them over, one by one: the morning's encounter with the violent puddler, Lisha Hodgkiss; the no less sinister first contact with Craig and Monaghan, and the ignoble, flattering falseness of Lucas; his explorations of the blue-brick pavements and crowded courts through which his rounds had taken him, and, finally his strange and momentarily embarrassing relation with Rachel Hammond.

Each of these incidents had been, in its own way, disquieting. They suggested that this Wednesford adventure, on which he had embarked so confidently, was not going to be quite as plain-sailing as he had imagined. He realized that he couldn't expect to make himself instantly popular with all Hammond's patients; that the contest with Craig and Monaghan would be (rather appropriately) a war to the knife, that even the mean figure of Lucas was not negligible. Yet, strangely

enough, it was not these but his memory of Rachel Hammond that haunted him most inexorably. Of course she was nearer to him, a single wall separated her room from his, and through that ponderable partition the influence of her silent proximity assailed him. There was no reason why he should be aware of it, except the fact that he was genuinely sorry for her. Yet there the influence stayed, and still he saw her—not as the figure silent and impassive whom he had left downstairs with her father, but in the wild and shadowy magnificence of the moment in which their task had been ended.

He was not, he assured himself, physically attracted by her. She wasn't, as he had already decided, his type; and yet it came to him as a sweet relief when, by an association of ideas that was easily explained, his thought turned to Edie, her physical opposite; Edie, asleep, no doubt, in her virginal cubicle at Marbourne: Edie, in her lovely whiteness, the source of that clear flame whose brightness bewildered him, whose incandescence had seared him and set his heart on fire, so rare, so free, so vaguely potent, so definitely intangible.

"Why should I think of her now?" he asked himself. "I'm certain that she never thinks of *me*. And why the devil should she?"

Inviolable shade! Perversely unconquerable hope! For he felt, as he closed his eyes to see her better, that there was one woman and only one in all his life.

## CHAPTER III

### HOSTS OF MIDIAN

And the evening and the morning were the first day . . .

Although each of them added something to Jonathan's knowledge of the Wednesford cosmogony, which thenceforward became his world, the days, weeks, in detail, from those first twenty-four hours. His life was fuller and increasingly strenuous as the grip of winter tightened on that iron land, squeezing still more light out of its smoke-throttled sky, chastening the desert with a glittering film of hoar-frost or coverlet of snow that veiled its degradations, save where the ever-burning pit-mounds penetrated their whiteness like black volcanic cones. So crowded were these days that Jonathan had little time to think of anything else but his work, and even if life had been more leisurely the interest of that work would still have held him, so satisfying in spite of its frustrations, so engrossing for all its monotony, was the new discipline of practice.

He began to realize that the studious years in North Bromwich and even those inspiring months of hospital work with Lloyd Moore were no more than a period of

probation. He was amazed at his own ignorance, abashed by the assurance which he had brought with him to Wednesford. At first he had been inclined to imagine himself astonishing the darkness of Wednesford with the light of complete medical modernity; the timely cleansing and ordering of Hammond's consulting-room symbolised his reforming vigour. Yet, as time went on, he found himself relying more and more humbly on the old man's experience and advice. For Hammond, knowing little of modern methods, had acquired, in forty years of practice, a clinical wisdom that left Jonathan's far behind.

He possessed, in fact, an instinctive faculty of divination, transcending science. To Jonathan, fresh from wards and laboratories, cases were cases, defined by signs and symptoms that declared themselves in bodies for all practical purposes anatomically identical. To Hammond, on the other hand, cases were primarily persons, and persons of an infinite variety modified by multiple factors of temperament, heredity, environment and even by transient emotions of which, in the empirical atmosphere of the hospital, Jonathan had never taken count. Old Hammond's skill was based not only on that fine product of practice, clinical instinct, but also on a deeper wisdom, grounded in humanity. He had been a student of life first, and medicine afterwards.

How various, how subtly fascinating that life was, the cloistered soul of Jonathan had never dreamed. Guided by the old man's rich and penetrating vision, inspired by

a habit of minute and swift observation so practised that its function had become unconscious, he became aware of the superficial nature of his own equipment, appalled by the complexity of the life in which he had become a part. In the beginning he had accepted Wednesford at its face value as an ugly, industrialized village, which fate had decreed as the scene of labours that were to make life possible for his mother, Harold and himself under the new conditions imposed by Mr. Dakers' death; as a means of livelihood, more or less ungrateful, in which his secret self, the repository of dreams and aspirations, would not be intimately involved.

At a later stage he had been oppressed by the sordidness, the squalor, the insistent negations of the lives and the surroundings of the people on whom he depended. Moving among them, assisting at the major dramatic moments of birth and suffering and death, he had been stirred to sympathy, indignation, admiration, pity, by the drama of their existence—but always remotely, as spectator rather than as a participant. Little by little he began to feel that this position of scientific detachment was not only ignoble but untenable. For better, for worse, he was becoming involved in these lives, an element in that corporate entity of Wednesford whose physical symbol was the pillar of smoke that rose from its fires by day, the lurid reflex that coloured its roofing heaven by night. Not only was he dependent for his livelihood on the fruits of its toil; it also made legitimate demands on his own vital energy. For one occasion in which his



skill was in request there were ten on which he must pay his footing as man and brother, sinking his personal inclinations in a service due to the individual need, and thereby to the common good.

So, by degrees, the patients became persons; admirable, despicable, pitiable, lovable. It was only as the individuals detached and defined themselves that the spirit of the mass became clear; and, that revelation once accomplished, he felt himself curiously proud of his part in it—proud, and at the same time humble.

The very violence of the contrasts which this industrial life of Middle England presented made it seem more actual, more vigorous. They were the spiritual counterpart of those physical contrasts which give the Black Country landscape a splendour of its own: the violent contrasts of light and shade that paint its nightly inferno: red-throated furnace flares and sputters of white-hot metal piercing the enveloping blackness of earth and sky or mirrored in the watery blackness of still canal-lengths; contrast of apocalyptic sunsets, burning through the breadth of heavens choked with carbon above slaggy plains; contrast of the black earth, stayed, like a lava-flow gone cool, against the bases of green hills, and woodlands rolling into the March of Wales; contrast of these sweet and immanent silences suspended on the verge of fierce metallic thunders—the thudding of hammers, the clangour of rolling mills, monstrous roaring exhalations of steam and flame.

And the spiritual contrasts of the folk who lived

among these portents, if less spectacular, were no less impressive. Against the degradation of grime and ignorance and grinding poverty and of the suffering that sprang from these, the soul of a doctor—Jonathan's soul—was gladdened and inspired by a universal steadfastness and courage that equalled the valour of any battlefield without the aid of warfare's exaltations. This race, deformed and stunted by labour like oaks gnarled by the wind, was hearted with an oaken core of bravery and kindness, alike incredible. It put the slacker texture of his own body and spirit to shame to see the devotion with which these men, their bodies exhausted by extremes of physical toil, would sit up night after night, attending not only their own wives and children but their sick neighbours with a gentleness that could find no expression in their uncouth speech. The strain of calamity did not only affect the family on which it fell: it was borne, and willingly borne by friends and neighbours as part of a common human obligation.

And if these people shared their neighbours' sorrows, they shared their joys as well. On the night of his arrival at Wednesford in a drizzle of rain, Jonathan had been conscious, beneath his enthusiasm, of a certain apathy, an unconcern that almost amounted to unfriendliness, among the passing crowd. Nobody had chosen to notice, much less to salute him. He was a stranger, and Wednesford, being sufficient unto itself, took no count of him. But now that he had been accepted as part of its life, Wednesford ceased to ignore him. To have

attended one patient in any of those squalid courts at the back of the High Street made him free of the rest of its inhabitants. As soon as it became known that he was a doctor, and something of a permanency, smiles and salutations greeted him; his black midwifery bag was like a red passport, conferring diplomatic privileges on the bearer wherever he went. People would nudge each other in the street, and tell each other who he was in that blunt dialect which he was beginning to understand and relish.

In this new light, the atmosphere of Wednesford, for all its harshness, seemed, above all things, cheerful. These people were as vigorous and full-blooded in their enjoyments as in their pains. On holidays, when the men streamed in their thousands to the football-ground, the air was full of rough, good-hearted jollity and easy laughter. On Saturday nights, when the shawled women went shopping, the High Street wore the aspect of a fair. At Christmas, when the shop fronts were decked with bright-berried holly and mistletoe and fat geese hung like a frozen cataract in the butchers' windows, the snowy, rollicking scene had the geniality of a Breughel picture. The people who mingled in the streets, red-faced, but defiant of cold, laughed and shouted to each other. Their horse-play was of a Rabelaisian spaciousness that seemed to derive not so much from the modern Midlands as from that Merrie England which Mr. Dakers had failed to restore to the sombre farm-labourers at Brimsley, or even from sources more remote,

the wassails of those Saxon ancestors whose rude names they bore. And Jonathan, whose big-boned body was nearer to that race than to the Norman crusaders of Mr. Dakers' invention, being English and even Midland to the marrow, found in their large and generous sense of living a kinship which, though sentiment played a part in it, was not entirely sentimental.

Of course there was another Wednesford, as little spacious and mediæval as the houses that contained it: that Victorian extension of the town, in the direction of Wolverbury, which had become the stronghold of the upper-middle class of small employers and professional people—the respectable and prim enclave in which Craig lived and, for the most part, practised.

Craig, by virtue of his association with even higher grades of society, the "county" families, islanded like drear sand-banks amidst the industrial tide, was the arbiter of all social standards among this prosperous community, and Jonathan, as Hammond's partner, would naturally have been excluded from it. But interest is more powerful than respectability; even snob-bishness must set a limit to its sacrifices; and Jonathan, in spite of Craig's discouragement—which took the form of charitable sympathy for deluded and unpractised youth rather than direct denigration—soon found himself the object of coquettish advances from the Wolverbury Road. Old Hammond, after all, could not drag on for ever; and though young Dr. Dakers had the disadvantage of being established in what was not

recognized as a "calling" house, acquaintance with him did not imply familiarity with that disgusting old man and that odd girl his daughter.

Mrs. Perry, the Rector's wife, was the first to condescend. The Church should be, within reason, above distinctions; and so she invited Jonathan to tea. Old Hammond sniffed, and Rachel smiled her secret smile, but Jonathan, discounting their bitterness of disillusion, went.

The Rectory was the oldest house in the Wolverbury Road, a square brick barrack, erected in the eighteenth-seventies to replace an older building profitably surrendered for the erection of the High Street shops. Dense shrubberies of laurels and conifers mercifully hid it from the road, and on its blank walls a sheet of ampelopsis justified, for once, its vulgar existence. Mrs. Perry, the Rector's wife, was "well-connected"; she was the daughter, that is to say, of an Indian Civil Servant with military connections that absolved her from being civil to anybody less important than the Hingstons (a border-line case), and fortified her position as a member of the Church Militant. The interior of her house proclaimed her origins. It was crowded with Benares brass, elaborate carving, inlaid ebony furniture, and contained more elephants to the cubic metre than all the zoos in Europe. A spare high-coloured woman of fifty, she received Jonathan in an atmosphere of sandalwood and draped in a Kashmir shawl.

"I am sorry that I am alone, Dr. Dakers," she in-

formed him. "But the Rector, as usual, is tormented with parish work. We were both of us delighted to hear that you had settled in Wednesford. The poor people here have been badly served." By Dr. Hammond, she implied. "The Rector has felt that deeply for many years. I am told that the infant mortality here is simply terrible. Comparable to that of India," she added, with an excusing glance at the nearest elephant, and then, by an unconscious association of ideas: "This tea comes from Dharjeeling; I hope you can appreciate it. The tea that's sold in Wednesford is simply undrinkable." But she hadn't invited Jonathan to talk about tea.

"Now that I know what you're like," she smilingly affirmed, "I shall be able to recognize you in church. We have high hopes of you, Dr. Dakers, I may tell you. The Rector is sadly in need of backing from"—she made a generous concession—"people of our own class. And when a young man like yourself sets a good example, it is a great help to us. Of course I know that a doctor's life is a busy one; the needs of his patients must naturally come first; but even our dear old friend Dr. Craig, whom we trust so *completely*"—she paused, with emphasis, to make that point quite clear—"doesn't—let's be quite candid!—support my husband as much as we could wish. Of course Dr. Craig's practice is of quite a different type from yours; most of his patients are excellent church-people already; but it's with the lower classes particularly—Wednesford, you know, is a hotbed of dissent—that the influence of a young man of

your stamp might be employed to advantage, don't you agree?"

The sudden question was thrown out like a challenge. Jonathan could do nothing but agree. If he *hadn't* agreed . . . But Mrs. Perry flushed with satisfaction, and proceeded:

"Of course, Dr. Dakers, I do not make rash promises. Naturally, you will understand that we can't possibly be disloyal to Dr. Craig. I do hope, by the way, you're going to be friendly with him; the dissensions of which, no doubt, you've heard are so unpleasant, not to say un-Christian. But my husband and I are not, I think, without influence. Good churchmen come first with us; and I really don't see why we shouldn't recommend a doctor in whom we find reason to be confident to those of our friends who employ a large number of servants. I am sure Dr. Craig wouldn't have any objection to that."

"Wouldn't he, by Jove!" thought Jonathan. "Just you try!"

"And then, of course," Mrs. Perry continued seductively, "new people are constantly arriving in the district, and, perfectly naturally, they always consult us about doctors. Up till now it has been quite impossible to mention any name but Dr. Craig's. Isn't that so?"

A sardonic Buddha, contemptuous of Mrs. Perry's practical Christianity, regarded Jonathan's confusion placidly from above her head. Luckily, this time, the question was rhetorical.

"But quite apart from all possibilities of that kind,"

she went on, "there are a thousand ways in which my husband and myself can be useful to you. We know the Wednesford people from A to Z. They have their peculiarities. Indeed, they're very peculiar. A word of advice, here and there . . ." A new thought struck her. "I gather you're not married, Dr. Dakers. Are you—you won't resent the question, will you—are you by any chance engaged?"

Jonathan said that he wasn't.

"Of course you're very young, aren't you? By the way, speaking of youth, I think it would inspire more confidence if you grew a moustache. You *will* excuse me being personal, won't you? I'm simply trying to help you all I can; and lookers on, you know . . ." She shook her finger archly at him. "However, what we were really speaking about was marriage. Let me be candid. I think it's most important for medical men to be married. Their work is so peculiarly intimate that ladies prefer it. I wonder. . . ." Her rapt eyes, staring before her, seemed to be passing in review a procession of eligible spinsters, all good churchwomen, with one of whom Jonathan might be tactfully united. Her choice was fortunately interrupted by the arrival of the Rector, flushed, presumably, from his parishional labours. Mrs. Perry, like a faithful retriever, laid her game ingratiatingly at his feet.

"This is Dr. Dakers, Clarence, of whom we have been speaking such a lot lately," she said. "I'm glad to say he sees eye to eye with me."



The Rector took Jonathan's hand and shook it heartily. Heartiness was the keynote of Mr. Perry's character. A lumbering, good-natured man, with a red face, whose colour was due to fresh air—not, as was Mrs. Perry's, to indigestion—he looked, and indeed had been, an athlete: an embodiment of the ideals of muscular Christianity which Charles Kingsley had made popular in his youth. According to his lights, which were as constricted as early English lancets, he was honest; but, like many strong men, he was weak, and the honesty of his nature was tempered by habitual submission, at any price, to the influence of Mrs. Perry, a woman of official traditions and an inflexible will, whose function it was to keep him, quite literally, in the narrow way. The massive childishness which characterized his conduct of the parish was combined with an innocence that Jonathan found engaging. Now, with a single sentence, he knocked the bottom out of Mrs. Perry's initial excuse.

"Been playing golf with Craig," he confessed ingenuously. "Really must wash my hands before I have any tea."

He blundered out like an ungainly, apple-cheeked schoolboy, leaving Mrs. Perry to explain away her lie. When he came back he ate greedily, enormously. "A splendid round," he said. "Beat him for once in a way. Do you play golf, Dakers? No? Ah, that's a pity! Still, after all, I suppose it's a game for the middle-aged. But one *must* get exercise, you know. Of course you know that; you're a doctor. You doctors

are always telling us we eat too much," he sighed, as he crammed another rock-cake into his mouth. "Your name, by the way, is familiar. Dakers . . . Dakers? I think there was a feller of that name up with me at Caius. Your father, perhaps? Why, of course! I've got it now. You're not related, by any chance, to H. H. Dakers?"

Jonathan informed him that Harold was his brother.

"My word! You don't say so! I congratulate you. A batsman in the real Cambridge tradition. We're proud of him, Dakers. A beautiful, beau-ti-ful style!"

But Mrs. Perry did not want to talk about cricket.

"You will be glad to hear, Clarence," she said, "that Dr. Dakers is aware of his responsibilities as a churchman."

The rector's face fell. Neither the time nor the place were suitable for this kind of discussion. In the chancel, in the pulpit, or even at committee meetings over which he presided, he was solemnly and conscientiously prepared to do his duty; but on a Saturday afternoon, when Sunday's sermon had been written, he felt it unfair that he should be reminded of it. He eyed his wife resentfully, petulantly, like a naughty child; but the habit of submission compelled him to adjust his voice and features to the occasion.

"Delighted," he said. "Of course I'm delighted, and thankful, to hear it."

"I think I ought to explain," Jonathan began . . .

But Mrs. Perry was not going to have the future

which she had mapped out for Jonathan complicated by explanations.

"I've been telling Dr. Dakers," she went on, "that supporters of his type are all too rare in Wednesford; and I've been considering in what practical ways we can help him."

"Of course, of course," the Rector agreed. He began to shuffle in his chair, and threw an appealing glance in the direction of the door. If Mrs. Perry had taken a fancy to this young man there was no knowing what inconveniences she mightn't let him in for. Honestly convinced that God was in his heaven, he could not believe that all was not right with the world. Far be it from him to meddle in the programme of divine dispensation! If people would only come to church on Sundays, communicate on the occasions specified by the prayer-book, and contribute generously, as he did himself, to the local and diocesan charities, Wednesford would be a New Jerusalem in Mercia's black, benighted land. As for this broad-shouldered young doctor, Providence would shape his end in defiance of all Mrs. Perry's Machiavellian carpentry (just as Providence, in God's good time, might make a gaitered rural dean of himself) provided that he continued to live a godly, righteous and sober life. Of course his own attitude was benevolent; he humbly—and again, honestly—hoped that it would never be anything else; but that didn't imply that he was going to embroil himself with Craig, who played golf with him on Saturdays,

was a gentleman, and never made inconvenient demands on his interest or—even in times of illness—on his pocket. Meanwhile . . .

"My dear," he said, "if you don't mind, I'm afraid you must excuse me. That letter to the Archdeacon . . . No, no, doctor, pray don't disturb yourself! So glad to have met you for the first time, but not the last, I hope. Please be sure and tell your brother how much an old Cambridge man admires him. Good-bye, good-bye!"

Followed by a glance from Mrs. Perry, which was like that of an offended, arch-necked swan, he shambled away; and Jonathan, profiting by the interruption, also escaped.

"Perry," said Old Hammond, "is just an enormous amoeba. But his wife . . . Ask Rachel! Huh?"

Rachel, for her part, was quietly amused. No indignations ruffled her placidity. "I hope you've a frock-coat and top-hat ready for to-morrow," she said. "The service begins at eleven."

"Of course I've no intention of going," he told her. "That's not in my line."

"It wouldn't make an atom of difference if you did," she said. "The Perrys are far too dependent on Craig to dare to help you. The next person to send you an invitation will be Mrs. Gaige."

"Why are you so sure of that?" Jonathan asked her.

"Because . . . No, you'd better find that out for yourself."

The reason for the invitation, which duly arrived, was ushered into Mrs. Gaige's drawing-room four days later in the shape of three blooming and unmarried daughters. The origins from which Mr. Gaige, the local auctioneer, had raised his wife to the dignities of the Wolverbury Road were humble. Her father, in fact, had kept a little pork and tripe shop in Dulston, from behind the counter of which Mrs. Gaige, in a white apron, had attracted her husband's attention. In youth she had been a pretty, buxom girl, and, as far as the exigencies of the business permitted, a daring one; in middle age, grown somewhat blowsy, though still, by Milanese standards, a fine piece of a woman, she had become a paragon of domesticity and a devoted mother to the three refined replicas of her youth, whom, with Mr. Gaige's collaboration, she had produced.

She had given them looks, in which her own coarseness of texture was somewhat attenuated by Mr. Gaige's relatively finer strain; her husband, an astute real estate agent and very nearly a gentleman, had provided them with education of a kind and the prospect of substantial dowries; all that they needed now was a husband apiece, and, since the Gaiges' social station was unique, husbands were a difficult problem. As a result of this pardonable anxiety Jonathan found the three Miss Gaiges, who, for the rest, were pretty, generous, modest, nicely-spoken and not unintelligent, a thought too luscious, too eagerly responsive, too shyly provocative.

Their mother was anything but shy. Her directness took Jonathan's breath away.

"There is such a dearth of young people in Wednesford," she said, "that really, upon my word, I don't know how my girls, with all the advantages they've had, can put up with it. Not that they're *gay*, Dr. Dakers. There's not a nicer behaved lot of girls, though I say it, nor a healthier, anywhere. But what they have a right to, and what they miss, is what you might call intercourse. Of course I'm a severe mother. A bit on the old-fashioned side. I like them to behave in keeping with their high-class education, not go gadding about like the shopkeepers' daughters. I tell them they must never forget Mr. Gaige's position, although of course, mother doesn't pretend to be anything special herself. Mother never had any extras: painting, ballroom dancing and music and so on. I never had advantages, doctor. Not *I*! But a gentleman who saw the sketches that our Flossie made at Llandudno last summer declares that they're really something extra. Flo, dearie, go and fetch Dr. Dakers your sketch-book, there's a sweet. Then Beatrice, in my humble opinion, plays the piano lovely. If you've a fancy for music, Dr. Dakers, she'll give us a tune after tea. Do you like Brarm? Brarm's waltzes are her favourites. And Dolly, that's my baby—aren't you, Doll?—dances divinely. I only wish you could take a turn with her and try for yourself."

So Jonathan, laved by the warm flood of Mrs. Gaige's

motherly pride, bathed in the melting modesty of the Miss Gaiges' soft and by no means inconsiderable physical attractions, examined Flo's sketches of the Great Orme's Head; heard Beatrice decimate the rain study of Chopin, a Brahms waltz and the Intermezzo from Cavalleria Rusticana with the impartial efficiency of a well-trained dog going through a series of hoops, and sat down with the united family to a high tea, that would have surfeited Gargantua, in the presence of all Mrs. Gaige's family silver.

"We *may* be old-fashioned," said Mrs. Gaige, "but we *are* homely. We don't put on any airs; but any time you like to drop in you'll always find us the same, and I and the girls and Mr. Gaige, I'm sure, will be delighted to see you. A little taste of home-life, now and then, will do you all the good in the world."

This playful intimacy once established, Mrs. Gaige became more familiar. Dismissing the girls to display their persons and accomplishments at a distance, she took Jonathan into her confidence.

"You know, Dr. Dakers," she said, "that Dr. Craig has always been our family attendant? That's only natural; Mr. Gaige has known him for so many years. But personally I could never bear to take sides in anything. Why shouldn't people be friendly and homely all round? Mr. Gaige and I have been a bit worried lately"—she lowered her voice—"about dear Dolly. Dr. Craig assures us that there's nothing to be disturbed about; but he's so used to the children, in a way of

speaking, that he doesn't treat it quite seriously enough for my liking; and an outsider—you know what I mean?—would look at it from a different point of view. So, now that you're handy, I wonder if you'd do me the favour of just running over her. Just the child's chest, you know. We could pop up into my bedroom. Will you, just as a friend? Don't mind me speaking frankly." She laid her hand on his arm. "I like the look of you. You're just what my little boy might have been if I hadn't lost him. Yes, every heart has its secret sorrow. Will you now, just to please Mother?"

"My dear Mrs. Gaige," Jonathan explained, "of course that's quite impossible. I couldn't examine your daughter without Dr. Craig's permission."

"Oh, go on!" said Mrs. Gaige. "Old Craig needn't know. Just between friends. Why, Dr. Craig doesn't own us! I've a right to consult anyone I want to, haven't I?"

Of course she had, Jonathan explained; still, medical etiquette . . . He was beginning to suspect, beneath Mrs. Gaige's homeliness, a desire to reveal to his dazzled eyes a new and more intimate aspect of her youngest daughter's charms. Beneath a barrage of melting looks and delicious shyness he made good his escape from the three sirens, who, ever afterwards, bowed to him and blushed at him in the streets of Wednesford. As for Mrs. Gaige, she felt herself so affronted by this refusal of her disinterested advances that she put it about that the poor young man had al-



ready fallen a victim to that Rachel Hammond, and was not the kind of person whom she would like to associate with her dear girls.

"Gaige is a decent enough fellow," Dr. Hammond told him. "He's a member, by the way, of the Hospital Committee; but that wife of his has the instincts of a procuress. I congratulate you on getting away so easily, huh?"

First Mrs. Perry, then Mrs. Gaige . . . The ladies of Wednesford did not find favour in the old man's sight. "Are they all as bad as that?" Jonathan demanded jokingly.

"Most of them. Huh? Ask Rachel! She'll tell you."

But Jonathan did not consult Miss Hammond on the subject of Dolly Gaige's chest.

Three other denizens of the world of Wolverbury Road engaged him. The first, and most influential, was Mr. Clarke, the solicitor. Clarke, being hungry for practice, was all things to all men. A jovial, subtle and rotund West Countryman, with small, dark eyes, and a perpetual, slightly sceptical smile, he made a dead set at Jonathan as the possible source of debt-collecting commissions. Like all the rest of them he laid claim to a particular knowledge of Wednesford; and in his case the claim was just for he had contrived to insert his finger in all the local pies.

"A word to the wise, Dakers," he said. "Don't take everything that old Hammond tells you for gospel.

The man is bitter—perhaps he has reason to be bitter, I don't pretend to know—and an outside opinion, frankly given, as mine would be, may some day be useful to you. You see I'm in the fortunate position of having clients of all the different factions in this place, and so I never take sides."

Which, in a way, was true: Clarke took so many sides that his various professions of sympathy cancelled each other; and, even though his breezy benevolence was too catholic to be genuine, Jonathan, in spite of old Hammond's disillusioned sneers, was inclined to like him.

To the second, Wheeler, the chemist, Jonathan took an instinctive dislike, quite apart from the fact that trade interests bound him firmly to the Craig party; since Craig, in his ambition to resemble a consultant rather than an ordinary general practitioner, did none of his own dispensing but sent his patients with prescriptions to Wheeler's shop, and, in spite of his apparent prosperity, was said to be heavily in the chemist's debt.

Wheeler was a refined, soft-spoken man of middle age, whose yellow skin suggested to Jonathan's mind the coloration of a drug-addict's; a diagnosis supported by his alternations of somnolence and loquaciousness.

"I'm glad you looked in," he told Jonathan, "because I'm anxious to be on friendly terms with all the doctors here. Of course I know that Miss Hammond is a qualified dispenser and that you put up your own medicines. Naturally, with a big club-practice, you wouldn't do anything else. But I can't help thinking," he suggested,

“that with private patients—and of course you’re bound to increase the practice in that direction—Dr. Craig’s plan is better. You can ask just as much for a consultation or a visit without medicine as with it; and somehow, I don’t know why it is, people like to have prescriptions to play with. It’s more classy, if you can take my meaning. I know you won’t object to my being frank with you, doctor.”

They were all frank with him, and all apologized to him for their frankness: yet, among all these people of the middle-class, there was only one whom Jonathan’s instinct adjudged to be genuinely frank. This was the Hammonds’ only habitual visitor, a middle aged widower, a nail-manufacturer named Morse.

John Morse, surprisingly, was a patient of the practice. For years he had been a member of one of Hammond’s clubs, and when, by reason of the prosperity which he owed to nothing but his own untiring energy he had become his own master and owner of the Vulcan Nail Works, he had not been tempted by snobbishness, as many men would have been, to let his membership lapse and become a private patient. As far as it went, his annual payment of five shillings counted as sheer gain, for John Morse was just as hard as his own nails. A stocky, heavily-built man, with rugged, dusky features and abundant iron-grey hair, slow-spoken, transparently honest even to ruthlessness, he was a typical product of the Black Country at its best. The grip of his enormous hands, calloused by their habitual contact

with the rods of iron that he distributed to the nailers who cut and hammered them into shape in their domestic forges, was as downright as the glance of his childish blue eyes. His loyalty to old Hammond was as firm as his handclasp. At the time of the Craig scandal he had been a young mechanic, without influence; and now that his persistence and honesty had made him a large employer of labour, respected alike for his sense of justice and his probity throughout the neighbourhood, he stood like a rock, four-square, above the turmoil of local pettiness, in old Hammond's defence. Politically he was a radical, suspected of socialism; in religion, a free-thinker, but in spite of these disqualifications his personal popularity had made him a member of the Town Council and of the Hospital Committee.

Once a week, regularly, he "dropped in," as they called it, to smoke an evening pipe with the doctor. Planted solidly in a chair by the fireside, pouring forth clouds of evil-smelling shag smoke, he hardly spoke a word that was not monosyllabic. His speech had the uncouth intonations and phrasing of the local dialect; yet, while he sat there, Jonathan always felt that the little room was possessed by a personality remarkable for its strength; that this rough uncommunicative man was somehow more stable than anyone else with whom he came in contact; that between him and the doctor, for all his silence, there existed the bond of a complete and sane virility. An understanding equally secure united Morse and Rachel. Before Jonathan's arrival she had

claimed his help in all the small mechanical emergencies of the household, plumbing and carpentry, with which she hesitated to trouble her father. He performed them quickly, efficiently, with no waste of words; he was always at her service, and yet, when Morse sat there smoking at night, no word passed between them from one end of the evening to the other. There was a curious settled confidence in this relationship which impressed Jonathan; for he was beginning to rely implicitly on the soundness of Rachel's judgments.

"There's going to be a change in Wednesford, John," said old Hammond one evening. "No more of our splendid isolation, huh? Dakers is a bit of a surgeon. He's going to use the hospital when he gets a chance."

"Why not? He's a right to," said John Morse slowly.

"Rights be damned!" said the doctor. "You know what happened to Lucas when he tried it. Craig will obstruct him all he knows."

"That's likely too. Craig's a hard nut to crack."

"If Dakers could rely on the Committee to back him . . ."

"He can't. Perry and Wheeler are in Craig's pocket. Gaige never comes to the meetings. Clarke's a wobbler."

"He can rely on you at any rate," Hammond suggested.

"Yes. If he's within his rights. But I'm only one."

"A sound one, anyway, John," said old Hammond. "You're worth all the rest put together."

Morse made no reply.

"But Wheeler . . ." said Jonathan suddenly. "Is *he* on the Committee? I thought he supplied the hospital with drugs and dressings. It seems to me he has no business to be there."

"If you feel like that, you'd better raise the question at the next public meeting," said Morse sardonically. "You're right enough, and I'll back you. It won't come to nothing, though. That gang's as solid as a pack of thieves. I tell you, you've an uphill job in front of you."

The words remained with Jonathan. On Morse's slow tongue they had a peculiar validity. Practice in Wednesford, he began to realize, was no bed of roses. Yet, as the months slipped by, bringing with them an increasing pressure of work, the labour was so engrossing, the promise of any spectacular success so remote, that he eventually resigned himself to its routine, encouraged by the fact that the monthly summary of returns, which Rachel, in her mysterious moments of leisure, prepared, showed a regular, if small, increase. Its very uniformity, it seemed, was no small part of the discipline of practice.

## CHAPTER IV

### FURZE ON UFFDOWN

OF course there were diversions of an unprofessional kind. Although Jonathan could never find time to visit Chadshill, which, near though it was, could only be reached by a cross-country journey through North Bromwich, Harold, who was now established at the School of Medicine, came over to Wednesford for several weekends, and in the Christmas vacation for a longer stay.

For Jonathan, who had no confidant but the sombre Rachel, these visits penetrated the gloom of Wednesford like shafts of sunlight; to his old love for Harold, based upon natural feeling and amplified by the traditional adulation of his parents, there was now added a new emotion, protective, almost paternal. For Harold, supported by him, was following in Jonathan's footprints, and when he came out to Wednesford, bringing with him the gossip of the School and the hospitals, all centred in the names of persons and places with which Jonathan was familiar, he was not merely the denizen of a happier younger world, relinquished willingly yet with regret, but also a kind of spiritual *doppelgänger* whose path it was Jonathan's privilege to make smooth out of his store of gay and bitter experience. Up to this point in their lives their ways had diverged, finding a

brief and, to Jonathan, a joyful contact in the pleasures of holidays. Now, through a blessed frown of fortune, they had become identical in thought as well as in action; and Jonathan clutched at this new identity as a generous, ecstatic compensation for his own deferred hopes.

On days when Harold was due at Wednesford he was as impatient as a lover, carrying his gaiety with him into the surgery to Rachel Hammond's amusement, hurrying through his morning round like a blustering wind, swinging down to the station long before the train was due, insisting on carrying Harold's luggage home in triumph.

Harold, as usual, took this enthusiasm for granted. At first, though he had accepted it bravely, the abrupt transition from Cambridge to North Bromwich, from careless affluence to narrow anxiety, had sobered and depressed him; but as soon as he found his feet in the School of Medicine he realized that his new surroundings, if less exalted, gave him, by contrast, even greater opportunities to shine. Not only was he older than the other men in his year; he also brought with him the social distinction of his school and college and the unchallenged athletic supremacy of a man who had already played cricket for his county. His handsomeness and his knowledge of a wider and less provincial world, together with the brightness of his intelligence, which had always been superficially remarkable, singled him out from the generality of his companions, and made him the object of innumerable flatteries and diffidences that



salved the wounds inflicted by his sudden descent. No doubt the aura of popularity that Jonathan had left behind him among students and staff contributed to the welcome which he found awaiting him; but Harold, the spoilt child, accepted it as his own by right of conquest and natural endowment, and Jonathan, looking for no other explanation, was duly, proudly impressed.

He had looked forward, when first he went to Wednesford, to "coaching" Harold in his work, to bringing nearer, by his own help, the day when they would practise together; but the studies which Jonathan had found arduous did not trouble Harold. He needed no help in them. He came to Wednesford for diversion, not for study; and if Jonathan were disappointed in his own uselessness, he had the compensation of sharing Harold's holiday mood, which not even the uncompromising appearance of Wednesford could quell.

"This is a rum-looking hole, Jonathan," he said, as they first trudged in the winter dusk over the bridge that spanned the Stour.

"Imagine it a hundred years ago," Jonathan told him, "or make it two hundred, when old Shenstone was alive. Can't you see the pack-horses shuffling downhill to the bridge, and that mass of Queen Anne stuff—Higgins's Buildings it's called—and the church tower pushing up behind? No smoke to speak of. Jolly little place!" He waved his arm, becoming enthusiastic. "Or go back further—back to the Saxons. Woden's Ford. Wood palisades and a colony of log-huts on the

further bank. Great fair-haired fellows driving in swine from the oak-woods at sunset, like Gurth in *Ivanhoe*. Forest right up to the edge of the settlement, where the gasometers are now. Where's your imagination?" he panted.

He raised his hand and called out a cheery good-evening to a group of workmen who saluted him as he passed. "Patients," he told Harold, "splendid fellows! As rough as be damned, but sterling good chaps when you get to know them." All along the street workmen and women were saluting Jonathan and every salutation gave him a flush of pride; he explained to Harold who each of them was; he wanted Harold to realize how sound and friendly all these pepole were, how quickly he, Jonathan, had been accepted by them.

"But haven't you any patients of a different class?" Harold asked.

"Not many. Hammond's is a poor-class practice. Personally I prefer it. Craig has the other sort, and as far as I'm concerned he's welcome to 'em. You know, Hal, I'm not out for social success. I'm a doctor. I'm interested in bodies, not in banking-accounts, and bodies in every class are much the same, when they're clean."

"They generally aren't," Harold said, doubtfully. "And the dirty ones would bore me to extinction."

"No, no, they wouldn't. Only wait and see! Medicine's a queer thing. When once it gets hold of you it flattens humanity out in the strangest way. Besides, when you come here, you can play the social

game for all you're worth. You'll wipe Craig's eye every time if you care to do so. I don't. That's just the difference." He paused. "Look at this square. Pure Georgian. Paved with cobbles and the church in the background. D'you see that jolly old cross? They call this the Bull Ring. It must have been used at one time as a market square. And that's our house," he pointed to the glowing windows in the low-browed stucco façade, and struck a match to show Harold his bright brass plate. "When your name comes in below there, old boy," he said, "it'll look a lot better."

That evening old Hammond was at his very best. Clean-shaven, in the visitor's honour, his lean face took on a curiously aristocratic air. His manners, brusque as ever, were impeccably fine as he did the honours of the little supper-table. Even Rachel had smartened herself for the occasion. Dressed in black velvet, bereft of the apron which she wore habitually, an old-fashioned chain and pendant of brilliants sparkling on her magnificent throat, she seemed, like her father, a survival from a more spacious if more formal age, apt to the setting of lucent mahogany in which her fine eyes flashed their appreciation of Harold's fluent compliments. In Harold's presence and in that unusual, festal atmosphere, she seemed to expand, to have become, of a sudden, not the sombre and purely domestic figure with whom Jonathan was familiar, but a great lady, beneath whose dignity smouldered the strength that he knew already and a passion which he had never suspected.

And Jonathan, seeing her, wondered, but was delighted. He took this transformation of Rachel and of the old man as a tribute solely due to the beloved Harold. He knew that he himself was incapable of giving such inspiration. And all the time, as he listened like a triumphant impresario, he was longing to cry out: "Didn't I tell you so? Haven't I said a hundred times what a splendid fellow he is?"

When supper was over, old Hammond, his memory brightened by a glass of whisky and Harold's eager questions, told them rich stories of the old life of Wednesford in the sporting times of his Victorian youth: of great runs with the Albrighton over the fields that now were Wolverbury; of hot cock-fights, in a cloud of bloody spurs and flying feathers; of historic mills, fought with bare fists like sledge-hammers between the giants whose names were mighty in the Black Country of those days; of a lusty, full-blooded life in the golden age of that harsh Arcadia.

"Professional football has killed all that," he told them. "A decadent race. But, by Gad, the Midlands still have more spunk in them than the South. Give me a colliery disaster, Dakers, and I'll show you men even now!"

"A fine old savage!" Harold asserted, when they were alone in their bedroom. "Not many of that kind left." And Jonathan, glowing with the success of the encounter, agreed. "But what about the girl—what's her—what's her name?—Rachel?" he rallied Jonathan.

"What are you going to do about it, Jonathan, old boy? Serve your seven years, like Isaac? Or was it Jacob? Honestly, you know, the creature's really magnificent. A throat like a statue of Hera. In that black velvet! I've seen nothing finer for years. What is she really like? You ought to know; you've had plenty of opportunities."

Jonathan put him off with a laugh; "I've no time to think of women, my lad."

But Harold evidently had. "You're a funny old dog, Jonathan," he said, "but in spite of your damned quietness I've heard all about you at Prince's. Sister Cronshaw, for instance. I gather you drew a blank. I'm thinking of trying my luck in that quarter too. Then who was the pantomime lady? And the beauty in Paris? I'd no idea you were such a notorious Don Juan!"

Jonathan tried to laugh him away from the subject; he had, in his bones, an instinctive objection to pursuing it; but for Harold it seemed, for the moment, more interesting than any other. Which was natural enough, Jonathan thought; how could any woman in the world resist the chance of setting her cap at such a good-natured, handsome boy, or Harold, with such abundant opportunity, reject what was offered to him? He listened, long and sympathetically, to the tale of North Bromwich conquests in which Harold was engrossed. Thank heaven, at least, he never mentioned Edie! He only hoped that these triumphs would not affect

Harold's work. Indeed, the boy was so full of his new life that they had talked for an hour before they spoke of Chadshill. Then Harold's voice darkened.

"You know, Mother's a queer soul, Jonathan," he told him, "I'm afraid she's really gone to pieces since father died. The truth of the matter is, I've nothing in common with her. I come home at night as a rule; but apart from the economy I might just as well stay away. We haven't a word to say to each other that really matters. She isn't interested in my work. Why should she be? She doesn't understand it anyway. But the deuce of it is that apparently she isn't interested in anything else except father's memory, that is. She seems—I don't know how to put it—to have lost her vocation. Sometimes I wish to God she'd get up and recite. She does recite, by the way, whenever she gets the chance—at tea-parties down in Halesby and shows of that kind. She seems to be getting mixed up with all sorts of queer people down there—anybody she can pick up who's willing to listen to her talking about father. You see, however much we pretend, she knows at the bottom of her heart that you and I think father's poetry's rot, and she keeps on throwing out little hints to show that she knows. There are times when I catch her looking at me as if she hated me. I tell you, Chadshill's no fun in these days anyway!"

Jonathan listened unhappily. "I must go and see her," he said.

"I don't think that'll do any good," said Harold,

doubtfully. "She scarcely ever mentions you, you know. She's got it firmly fixed in her head that you resented printing those ghastly remains."

"I did. But we printed them just the same. What can we do about it?"

"God knows. I don't"

"She's our mother, Hal."

"I know. But she isn't. She's a sort of changeling. Something's gone out of her that used to be there. I sometimes wonder. . . ."

"What?"

"If she's really quite sane."

"Good God, Hal! Don't suggest it!"

"Well, we're a queer family, you know."

"Do you think it'd be better if I got her to come over here? We could set up housekeeping, all three of us."

"Good Lord, no! That would be fatal. She'd be quite lost. The only connection she has with ordinary life is through father. She hangs about the study like a ghost; she carries his books with her wherever she goes. Although she hardly ever opens her lips to me, she bores everybody she meets stiff with talking about him. If she left Chadshill, I believe she'd simply fade out to nothing like the Cheshire cat. D'you know, Jonathan, it's an awful thing to say, but I simply can't bear her smile. She smiles all the blessed time; it's a sort of ghastly fixture. If it weren't for the life at Prince's I don't think I could stick it . . . honest!"

They went on discussing the situation over and over again; and their candour, their complete understanding of each other, seemed to Jonathan a kind of treachery. While admitting the bitter truth of what Harold said, some part of him, deeper than thought, persisted in adoring his mother. It had always adored, and would continue to do so. In his childhood she had accepted that adoration as a matter of course, offering nothing in return; he had neither expected nor demanded anything in return; but now, as years went on, that maternal indifference seemed according to Harold to be turning to an active dislike, and there was nothing to comfort him unless it were the fact that without his aid she would not even be able to live. He tried to put this tragic relationship out of his mind by laying open another of his wounds to Harold's scarifying candour.

"Have you heard anything of the Martyns lately?" he asked, and, as he spoke he felt his own heart beating so loudly that it seemed as if Harold, lying beside him, must have heard it.

"The Martyns? No, of course not. They dropped me like a hot cinder," Harold answered bitterly. "Alec's gone back to Cambridge, but he hasn't written. Sheila, when I last heard, was doing her damndest to get hold of George Delahay. Honor, I suppose, is hunting for all she's worth."

"And Edie?" The very name made Jonathan tremble.



"Edie, I imagine, is still at Marbourne. . . . By Jove!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"What, Hal?"

"Why, Edie! I'd almost forgotten her existence. She must often be in North Bromwich; I must look her up."

"I should," said Jonathan, cursing his own imprudence. Why, in heaven's name, had he reminded Harold of her? Yet what, if the truth were told, could Edie be to either of them? He made a desperate attempt to drag the conversation into less painful channels, speaking once more of the practice and their future plans, and, above all, of the inevitable clash with Craig.

"Sooner or later," he told Harold, "we're bound to come to blows. At present he's keeping one eye on me like a jealous dog. Quite polite when we meet—which isn't often. Too polite, in fact. Although I've never hit him hard, you know, I'm cutting into the lower strata of his practice all the time. I'm beginning to use the hospital. He can't stop me, although I can see by their faces that he's putting the staff against me. He's always looked on the place as a private nursing-home. So far I've only dealt with medical cases—pneumonias and so forth; but as soon as I set foot in the theatre the fat'll be in the fire. The beggar's mad on surgery. So am I, for that matter. But with him, you know, it's a sort of personal passion; he likes to think that he's the only man who can touch it. I've been buying instruments—that's why I've had to keep you rather short, old chap; it just can't be helped at present—but when

the time comes, what's going to dish me is the want of a good anæsthetist. Of course I could call on them; but I don't trust Monaghan. That's partly why I'm so anxious for you to get qualified as soon as possible. When we two get together, Hal, we shall be able to beat the band."

"Oh, I shall get qualified all right," said Harold sleepily. Although he had been listening, it was clear that these details of the Wednesford practice, so near to Jonathan's heart, were actually boring him. Medicine, with him, would never be a vocation, and medicine, alas, as a mere means of livelihood was a sorry business.

Next day, when Jonathan proudly showed him the rehabilitated surgery, enthusiastically explaining the changes that he had made in that stable of Augeas, Harold smiled at his ardour with a kindly patronage; his eyes and ears were all for Rachel going about her routine of work in the dispensary. And when, in the crisp winter morning, he walked out with Jonathan on his round, charitably lending an ear to the technical explanations that Jonathan poured forth on the subject of his cases, acquiescing cheerfully but without enthusiasm when Jonathan proudly introduced him to his patients, his mind was obviously miles away from Wednesford, and Jonathan, always trying to persuade himself that this was only natural, knew it, with a faint sinking of heart. He had no right to expect Harold to be like himself. Harold had always, always been

different from him, and none the less—perhaps all the more—adorable. Besides these were early days. As a student, Jonathan himself had been unconscious of the exhaustive demands that Medicine would make on him; later, he had realized the abnegations, the complete devotion, which that grave mistress exacted. So Harold, in the course of time. . . . There was always hope.

For the present a series of mistresses unallegorical and by no means grave appeared to be encouraging his egotism with their complaisance. More luck to him! It was a good thing, Jonathan thought, that his mind should be diverted from the disappointment of leaving Cambridge. Any circumstance that might make North Bromwich attractive to Harold had its uses. In the meantime, apart from the joy of his companionship, Jonathan extracted a vicarious pleasure from the admiration that Harold had excited in Wednesford. Hammond was enthusiastic.

"A fine, clean fellow; I like the cut of him," the old Philistine declared. "We don't breed many of that sort in these days, Dakers. It carries me back fifty years to see him about. He'll get on, that boy; you can take my word for it."

Rachel was less spontaneous in her approval; she would say nothing about Harold till Jonathan dragged it out of her.

"What do you want me to say? He's jolly, and young, and decidedly handsome."

"He's far more than that," Jonathan maintained.

"That's just the surface of him. His mind is extraordinarily brilliant: a first-rate brain."

"I don't know that that specially appeals to me. Cleverness means so little."

"He has character, too. Of course, I can see you don't like him. I could tell you, he was much more complimentary about you."

Rachel blushed swiftly. "Was he? Yes, I'm sure he's extremely interested in women."

"Why shouldn't he be? They're generally interested in him."

"You aren't, you know. That's one great difference between you."

"Now it's you who are being too clever, Miss Hammond," Jonathan laughed. "If that's what you think, I can assure you you've made a mistake."

"Have I?" She surveyed him solemnly, then shook her head and smiled:

"No, no, Dr. Dakers. I know you better than you think. You're attracted by women to begin with; then you romanticise them. In those two ways you'd be capable of any devotion. And that would satisfy you. But real intimacy. . . ."

"Friendship, you mean?"

"No, not friendship," she blushed: "I mean love."

But whether she intended a compliment or a criticism Jonathan had neither time nor inclination to decide. He wasn't particularly interested in what she thought about himself; but the fact that Harold hadn't impressed her

as much as he should have done only showed, if proof were needed, what a queer, obstinate creature she was. How queer he had cause to realize, when a few weeks later at the breakfast-table she handed him a letter which had come by the morning post.

"This is yours," she said with a formality quite unnecessary, and then blushed furiously and turned away. He took it and thanked her, putting it into his pocket, and wondered why on earth she was behaving so strangely, why, all through the meal, her dark eyes watched him with such anxiety. It was only in the middle of the morning's round that the need of some paper on which to scribble a note made him take the letter out of his pocket again and, with a sudden throb of the heart, recognize Edie's writing.

"My dear Jonathan, he read:

*"Have you deserted me entirely? Please don't do that. I've been wondering about you for months and meaning to write to you, but I had no idea of your address until this morning when I ran into Harold in Battie's. Then I realized more than ever how much I miss you. We've had such jolly times together, Jonathan dear. It seems a shame, that we should lose each other entirely. I wonder if we could meet again—say next Saturday afternoon, and go for one of our old walks over the hills. If it's quite impossible—Harold tells me you're dreadfully busy—let me know at once. If you can manage it there's no need*

*for you to come into North Bromwich. I'll take a train out to Wychbury—there's one that arrives there at two-forty—and you can come cross-country by Stourton and meet me there. But you will come, won't you?*

*'Eddie.'*”

The elation that surged through him as he read was so devastating that, for a moment, he forgot what he was doing. His patient, a sad, thin woman, convalescent from bronchitis, must have thought that he had suddenly gone mad. When he became aware, at last, of her wondering eyes, Jonathan laughed out aloud.

“Excuse me, Mrs. Bagley,” he said. “An important letter! I'd forgotten to open it and came upon it suddenly. You know, you're going along splendidly,”—All the world was splendid!—“Send up to the Surgery some time this afternoon. What you need now is a tonic, something to buck you up. Of course you mustn't dream of leaving your bed for a day or two.”

The patient's face fell.

“Oh, doctor! Cor' I get up this afternoon?” she pleaded breathlessly. “I cor' ask other folkses to look to the childer much longer. I'd far liever see to them myself doctor. The ess-hole's hauf choked wi' mullock and the brewhouse full up wi' Sam's cloos. He'll take on fine if he don't get a shift for Saturday, Sam will.”

“Now don't you go werriting about Sam,” said Jonathan firmly. “You send Sam up to me to-night,

and I'll tell him. You don't want the kids to lose their mother, do you?"

He was trying, valiantly, to put himself in the place of this poor creature pleading so anxiously to undo the good that he had done her; yet, as he spoke, he could think of nothing but Edie. It was curious that in thought she always appeared to him in the white satin frock which she had worn on that first, miraculous night in the moonlight of Silver Street: the gleaming wonder of a madonna lily, waxen and fragile, with stamens of dull gold. This vision haunted him as he pushed his way through a rout of screaming children into the mean street. It came to him with exultation, but without happiness, with a strange mingling of desire and fear. Harold had taken his hint; Harold had seen her. For a moment the jealous agonies of the Cambridge match at Alvaston returned to him. Yet, after all, the result of Harold's meeting with her had been nothing but this letter to himself. He read it over and over again, trying to extract some hint of a deeper emotion from its mere friendliness. That friendliness he knew well; it had brought him nothing but torture of heartache; and yet, poor beggar, he knew that he couldn't reject it. Even those crumbs were a feast to his hungry heart. That meeting, so desired, so dreaded, so callously, skilfully planned in a setting saturated with memories of his passion, would do nothing, he knew—and Edie must know it too—but unsettle the accepted tenor of his resignation. Yet,

from the first, he knew also that he could not deny himself the ecstasy of this pain.

He wrote back to Edie, confirming the appointment at Wychbury, and made arrangements with old Hammond to hold the fort over the week-end, hoping not only to extend his time in Edie's company but also to pay the visit to his mother at Chadshill which had been long on his conscience. Curiously, and yet deliberately, he said nothing of these plans to Rachel. There was no reason why he shouldn't have taken her into his confidence; but, somehow or other, he felt that a confession would have led to awkwardness between them; that even if she hadn't been hostile, she would have been unsympathetic; her perceptions were far too realistic; they threatened damage to his romantic mood.

And, even though she was unaware of his precise intentions, he knew that her dark eyes detected the expectancy which thrilled him during the rest of the week. Though she was more silent than usual, they watched him continually with something of the clinical intentness, shrewd and reserved, with which a wise physician regards the looks, the movements, the nervous reactions of a case. In moments of distraction—for he found it difficult to keep his thoughts on anything but Edie—the smile that accompanied her scrutiny became disquieting. It almost compelled him to let her know the truth; but that, after all, his reason indignantly asserted, was no business of hers, and so he held his tongue.



On Saturday morning he broke it to her that he was going away. The announcement sounded like a challenge. She took it calmly, as though she had been expecting it—too calmly for a matter of such importance.

"I hope you'll enjoy yourself," she said, in a tone that veiled implications which nettled him.

"What do you mean?" he asked her. "Why do you put it like that?"

"Nothing but what I say. I'm sure you'll enjoy yourself."

"I wish to goodness," said Jonathan, "I were as sure as you are."

Her attitude had the effect of sharpening his uncertainty. She must know, as well as he did, that he was in pursuit of a shadow. "Go your way," she seemed to be saying, "when you come back, wounded, I shall be here." But what in the world, his reason persisted, had she to do with it?

"I'm going to see my mother," he volunteered.

Her cheeks flushed faintly. "Yes?" was all she said.

Some celestial conspiracy had decreed that the day should be peerless. A pale and wintry gold etherealized the platform at Wychbury on which Jonathan stood waiting for the North Bromwich train. The air was utterly still, so silent that the clank of the levers that signalled its arrival startled his heart into his mouth. The sooty coaches came thundering down the gradient as though inspired by the clarity of that thin, clean air. The Westinghouse brakes sighed, the train came to a

standstill, and there, like a frail emanation of wintry sunshine, thinly, radiantly unsubstantial, was Edie: her white, firm little hands were in his, her eyes, her red lips smiled; the faint, familiar perfume that was her own, as its perfume is a flower's, reached him from the flower petals that were her cheeks. She smiled, and, amazingly, put up her face to him, as though she expected to be kissed. He kissed her, trembling. Such a wonder had only once entered Jonathan's life before.

So shattered was he by this astounding privilege that they had been walking for several minutes before he recovered his senses.

"Where are we going, Jonathan dear?" she asked.

He laughed. "I don't know. I've no idea where I am. The sight of you, after all this time, has simply taken my breath away. I can't believe it's really you at all."

"Jonathan, Jonathan!" she warned him. "But that's your fault, my dear. Why have you never written to me? You might as well have been dead."

"I have been dead," he told her. "I'm only just coming alive again. Be patient with me, Edie."

"All right. I'll try to be patient."

She smiled at his confusion with a fond friendliness.

"Suppose we go up the Uffdown valley, past the Manor?" he said. "Then, by Sling Pool, to the top of Uffdown itself."

"Very good, Jonathan. I'm your woman!" she said.

It was true, in a sense that she did not suspect when

younger than Harold and me: That's how it works out; the young are always older. We stand on your shoulders; we start where you leave off; your experience seems to us a sort of touching naïveté; the things that you're beginning to discover we've taken for granted long ago or got tired of, Harold and I. And it's just the same with modern music and literature. The idioms and ways of thought that seem extravagant to you are in our blood, so to speak. As I was saying to Harold. . . ."

There was far too much Harold about her. Even though he adored Harold, Jonathan hadn't come to Wychbury to talk about him. Leaving behind them the cold and placid water of the Sling pools, in which the silver slenderness of birches, whose leaves gleamed like tiny golden fruit, was reflected as from a glossy surface of ice, they were climbing through brakes of bronzed fern, toward the crown of Uffdown. The air was sweet and still, aromatic with scents of bruised bracken and tardy furze; their climbing footsteps thudded softly on ancient turf. As they neared the crest a wind, new-born, yet imperceptible on the lee of the hillside, caught them, blowing loose the strands of Edie's dull-gold hair, blooming her cheeks with an impetuous flush of healthy blood. She stood on the brow of the hill—for, climbing, she had outstripped him—a wild and lovely figure. The wind blowing through her outstretched fingers and her flying hair seemed to infuse and possess her with its own spirit, making her eyes

sparkle and her lips smile. She was as free, as clean, as intangible as that wind, which freshened so quickly that their words were blown away from them. On the edge of the pinewood, whose branches sang like a sea breaking on fine shingles, they took shelter, sitting close as lovers, in a resinous stillness.

"These things don't change, at least," Jonathan said. "When everything else is fluid, these hills endure. The spirit of the time, or whatever you call it, can't touch them."

She smiled at him with a kindliness not unmixed with pity.

"You love them, don't you? You love so many things, Jonathan." He shook his head; there was one thing that he loved above all others; and Edie, reading a signal of danger in his eyes, hastily transferred their converse to a plane less perilous.

"Tell me much more about Wednesford. I want to catch up with you."

"I think I've told you everything that matters."

"No, no, you haven't. There's a girl."

"A girl?"

"A Miss Hammond, Harold said. . . ."

"Rachel? She's a queer creature. I can't say much about her. For me, as you know, there's only one woman in the world."

"But that one's in love with you—Rachel Hammond, I mean."

"Ridiculous nonsense!"

"Why should it be ridiculous? It seems to me quite natural. Harold says she's beautiful. And Harold's an amateur in women. I've seen him myself, though he isn't aware of the fact, with a considerable selection. On the whole I admire his taste. It's better than yours . . ." she added, with a hint of mischief. "But really, joking apart," she went on, amused by his obstinate silence, "I'm sure it's time for a rising young medical practitioner like you, to be thinking of marriage, if only for the sake of the practice; and if Miss Hammond is as attractive as Harold makes her out to be, why, what could be better? The ambitious apprentice and the master's daughter! That's quite in the good old tradition. So useful, too. She does the dispensing, doesn't she? I think Harold told me. . . ."

"Harold appears to have told you a devil of a lot in a short time, Edie."

"It wasn't a short time. We had tea together. I asked him a lot of questions about you. You ought to be flattered." She paused. "Why, surely, Jonathan, you're not being jealous . . . of Harold?"

"Edie, I'm jealous of every living man who comes near you."

"Oh, Jonathan, Jonathan!"

"For God's sake let's talk about something else. I'm devoted to Harold, as you know, but whenever you speak his name's dragged in somehow or other. I believe you do it on purpose. You're a cruel little

beast. It's an unfair advantage. Nobody can hurt me as you do."

"Poor dear! I don't want to hurt you, brother Jonathan. Let's walk in the wind. That'll blow your bad temper away."

She took his hand gently. He rose, and pulled her to her feet. She was so light, so fragile, that with another ounce of strength he could have swept her up into his arms. At the corner of the fleece of fir-trees the risen wind smote them, charging out of a wake of torn clouds among which a misty sun sunk dying, full in their faces, with a strength so mightily restored by the still morning's respite that they could not battle against it and speak at the same time. Edie's tweed skirt was blown to the shape of her slight figure; she could scarcely make headway.

"Put your arm behind me, Jonathan," she said. As she turned to him, her hair blew in his face, the warmth of her firm living body was pressed against his extended arm, and at that pressure Jonathan felt a strange constriction in his breast. Edie was as much aware of this contact as he was.

"Do you remember," she laughed, through the bluster of wind, "that night when we danced together at Silver Street?" Did he remember!

"I thought you were the worst dancer and the oddest creature I'd ever met. I was never more astonished in my life than when you tried to make love to me. Nearly three years ago! Whoever would have im-

agined, in those days, that we should be friends? Have you ever danced since, Jonathan dear, or was that too much for you?"

"I never want to dance with anyone but you," he told her.

"I think that's extremely wise of you, Jonathan. I wouldn't if I were you. What a puzzling family you are! Harold dances quite beaut. . . . Oh, damn it! My hat!"

She thanked him, gravely, as he retrieved it from a thicket of gorse. "I'd better carry it till we get out of this," she said. But even when the shelter of Uffdown valley received them once more she did not abandon his support. They walked more slowly, breathlessly, his arm still about her, her hand clutching his. The force of the wind had swept the blood out of her cheeks, her hair, blown back from the smooth forehead, revealed the classic pencilling of dark eyebrows curved like a swallow's wings; her face seemed smaller, pale, and somehow, childlike in its purity of hue and form. There was that in it which filled him with wonder rather than passion.

So, when in a cottage on the outskirts of Wychbury they sat down to tea, the exaltation of Jonathan's mood had faded beyond recovery. They talked soberly, while they ate, no longer of Jonathan but of her work in Marbourne; the friends, the interests she had found there; her relations with her own family at Silver Street.

"Mother," she told him, "can never persuade herself

that I'm quite respectable. No well-bred woman can earn her living and still retain her caste. When I go home, which isn't often, I feel I'm an anachronism. Sheila and Honor are very nice to me; and yet, you know, we haven't one single thing in common now. Have you a cigarette, Jonathan? No, of course. You wouldn't! What was I saying? Oh, Marbourne. This summer I shall have finished the course and got my diploma. Then, heaven knows what will happen. Teaching, I suppose. I haven't a medical mind, like yours. I don't fancy massage."

She told him what she had been reading. Shaw, Butler, Wedekind, Sudermann. She smiled when Jonathan himself confessed to Plotinus. She asked him questions about it. In the outer mist of Neo-Platonism they lay becalmed like fog-bound ships. A curious, dead listlessness descended upon them, in which the sun-lit intimacy of the early afternoon was lost. Twilight had fallen when they walked back to the station. On the wintry platform of Wychbury they said good-bye with a curious, remote formality. Yet when the black coaches jolted out of the station on their way to North Bromwich, carrying Edie's slim and now inexplicably pitiful figure away from him, Jonathan felt his heart sore within him, as if all that mattered in it had been torn away.

With this sensation of emptiness he faced the long pull over the dip in the Clents to Chadshill. There was no joy, nor even the satisfaction of a duty performed,



in that return. All through that grinding tramp, with the wind behind, a sense of loss and futility haunted him. When he reached Chadshill, a light in the study window beckoned but did not welcome him. Through the uncurtained panes he could see his mother sitting, an open book in her lap. The flicker of firelight showed him her lips, set, as always, in a smile of expectation. She sat there waiting in her shabby, flowing draperies, as she had watched for many thousands of evenings. Waiting for what? For Harold? For Mr. Dakers? She certainly was not waiting for Jonathan.

When he entered the house, and hung up his things in the hall, she received him with her accustomed kiss, but without astonishment or enthusiasm. She didn't seem to realize that this was the first visit after many months. She took him, as she had always taken him, as a matter of course. It seemed as if time had no more reality for her—if it had ever had any reality. She had waited so often, so long.

When the clock struck seven she moved, like an automaton connected with its mechanism, to prepare the supper. Nothing had changed at Chadshill. Not only the supper things, but even the viands seemed to be the same. Jonathan enquired for Harold. Harold had not arrived, was not even expected. On Saturdays he often stayed the night in town. This was a grave disappointment to Jonathan. Now that Edie was lost, he had looked forward to Harold's company. All through the meal Mrs. Dakers hardly spoke a word; and when,

with the same automatism, the supper had been cleared away, and she returned to her seat in the study, opposite to the sacred chair in which his father had sat, she took up the open book (it was *David: A Tragedy*) from the stool on which she had placed it and laid it again on her knees.

"I hope you're not finding life too dull here, mother darling," Jonathan said.

"Dull, Jonathan? How can it be dull? I live on memories."

"Harold tells me that you often see people in Halesby. I'm glad to hear that."

"There are a certain number of people who have an appreciation, a memory for your father's work," she answered, with a hint of criticism in her voice. "With those I am glad to mingle. He would have wished it."

"Tell me, who are they?" he said.

Deliberately and rather unwillingly she mentioned a number of names that meant nothing to him and described their owners. They sounded, all of them, pretty awful to Jonathan. Indeed the whole tone of Mrs. Dakers' conversation seemed to his ears exceptionally—there was no other word for it—silly. Through all of it there ran a vein of fatuous exaltation which, taken in company with her perpetual, unmeaningly satisfied smile, gave him the effect of a bland dementia. This woman, whom he had always regarded, and still regarded, in spite of her unreality, with a blind, unquestioning devotion, had now attained a degree of the un-

real which was frightening, fantastic. Herself, her words, her surroundings, the whole house, in its physical and mental isolation, had the quality of a bad dream. It was difficult for Jonathan to believe that he had ever lived in it in the flesh. And when, at ten o'clock precisely, Mrs. Dakers closed the book, which she had not been reading, then kissed him, and moved, like the ghost of some stage character, to bed, the sense of actuality entirely forsook him. It was no good, he decided, waiting up for Harold; and so, like another ghostly dramatic figment himself, he made his way to the familiar, unfamiliar bedroom, where the gay bindings of the boys' books that he and Harold had read as children shone in the flicker of candle-light. He picked up one and opened it; saw, on the flyleaf, the rounded script of his own schoolboy hand. Not even that was real. The boy who formed those letters no longer existed. They were part of the ghostly life of this dead place, unimaginable, unrecoverable. "I am growing old," he thought. "I am growing old."

But the practice was growing, too.

## CHAPTER VI

### HIGGINS'S BUILDINGS

DURING the next year Jonathan saw Edie rarely. At the end of that summer she left Marbourne with her diploma and completed the scandalization of the Martyn family, who had never dreamed that it would come to anything as bad as that, by taking a post as gymnastic mistress in a big girls' school in Sussex. She continued to write to Jonathan three or four times a year, and these letters, conveying to him the flavour of her spiritual essence, yet sparing him the provocation of her physical presence, were less unsettling, he was forced to admit, than her company. It was flattering to know that she still remembered him sometimes, even though her relation with him had as little connection with his terrestrial present as had the scintillations of Sirius. Her letters delighted him as from an astronomical remoteness of time and space, and this stellar communion was a better substitute for passion than the bitter joys of renunciation with which he had consoled himself.

In a material sense, the next three years were prosperous. Jonathan's hard work, his conscientiousness, his willingness to take trouble without regard to pecuniary reward, had ended by impressing themselves on the scepticism of Wednesford; and, unexpectedly, pecuniary reward had come, not so much from an inva-

sion of the lower levels of Craig's domain as from a greater willingness among the private patients to pay cash and a diminution of the bad debts, both of which reflected the prosperity of the district as much as its increasing friendliness toward Jonathan. Once more, after the dead years that followed the Boer War, the Black Country was advancing in a gradual crescendo, toward that grand finale of the Age of Iron thunderously initiated by the drum-taps and drum-fire of nineteen-fourteen.

Though this dread card still lay hidden in the hand of Fate, Jonathan realized that, for other reasons, he had come to Wednesford only just in time. In his second year it became apparent that old Hammond, despite his tenacity, was beginning to go down-hill. Not that he admitted it for a moment. His failing strength was so tactfully, so skilfully conserved, his expenditure of energy so carefully adapted to his powers, that outsiders, who saw him stumping out on his round, continued to congratulate him on having taken a partner and a new lease of life together. But Jonathan's medical eye and the old man's realistic consciousness knew better.

When Hammond had been without help, playing his lone hand to the bitter end, the very precariousness of his position had inspired him with an unreal, fortuitous strength. Now that Jonathan's partnership enabled him to relax, to break the rhythm of exertion which had carried him onward with the inertia of a revolving fly-wheel, he began to lose "way." His mind, accustomed,

automatically, to movement in one direction, refused, when that movement was ever so little interrupted, to answer the helm. Its worn mechanism was only capable of producing power at a high rate of revolution; at lower speeds, even with a lightened load, the engine began to sputter and misfire; and Jonathan's help, which had saved him from immediate calamity, became the ultimate instrument of his undoing.

The spectacle was sad. Apart from his work the old man had no interests. The sports of his youth had vanished along with it. There remained not one diversion from which he could extract even a vicarious pleasure. He could not read; for reading is a habit, and habits are not to be acquired in the twilight of life. His library, apart from out-of-date medical works, consisted of the novels of Surtees and Whyte-Melville and the mud-coloured volumes of the Badminton series. Incapable of absorption in present interests, for the surface of his mind reflected passing events as faultily as a frozen lake, he was compelled, and contented, to seek them beneath that unreceptive layer, in dim depths, where, as his eyes grew accustomed to their dusk, forgotten shapes, lost memories defined themselves with an arbitrary and an increasing clearness. Already, in this light of day, he was living on the banks of Acheron, moving in contact and converse with the shades of men and women more actual to him than those whom he encountered in the flesh. That was his real world, the world of his youth, in which he could feel at home and

potent again. The sublunary scene to which life caught him back unwillingly was alien, embarrassing, full of pains, frustrations and admonitions of a mortality which for some reason unexplained, seemed different from that of the shadows among whom his memory dwelt.

As far as the doctor's feelings were concerned, Jonathan's pity would have been wasted on him. The vividness with which the past emerged from those deeps enchanted him continually. It pleased him to reconstruct the last details of that old life in Wednesford, to recount them with a proud and eager garrulousness for Jonathan's delectation.

"What do you think of that?" he would grunt. "Who says my memory's failing, huh?"

His very longevity gave him an excuse for pride. "I'm older now than my father ever was," he would say, "and I've outlived all the rest of the family by four years. That's not so bad, when you come to think of it! And yet," he declared, "upon my soul, I feel as if I were a boy. It's a rum feeling, Dakers, when first you realize that you're old. Right up till recently I've always thought of myself as being younger than other people. Then gradually, one by one, the folks of your own generation begin to drop out; it strikes you as funny; you never think of comparing yourself with them; and then, one day, you look round and find that you're all alone and everybody treating you as if you were Methuselah. Well, now I *am* old, and there's no denying it!"

The admission seemed to give him a new and subtle satisfaction. The young spirit within him, companion of those shades along the verge of Acheron, appeared to contemplate the ageing body which it inhabited with a detached, patronizing amusement; to play with it, as a child plays with a grey-bearded mask, to regard it, all too justly, as a disguise easily discarded and having no stable connection with what was inside.

But to Jonathan's eyes, alas! the mask was the man; and the man, by every medical criterion, was approaching dissolution. For practical purposes the memory of which old Hammond boasted no longer existed. Its movements were so unreliable that each one of them had to be verified and checked. He lost his spectacles, his visiting-list, his stethoscope, everything that he could possibly lose except his way about Wednesford. To counter these lapses of memory he devised a system of mnemonics so ingeniously complicated that they turned his searches for lost trifles into a prolonged and romantic treasure-hunt. When, by this tortuous process, he succeeded in finding them, he advertised his triumph as if it were an exhibition of exceptional acuteness, repeatedly calling their attention to his virtuosity, a little childishly—to tell the truth, a little conceitedly.

That was surprising, for old Hammond's modesty had been one of his most engaging qualities; but now he was always on the look-out for imaginary slights; he began to suggest that when patients asked to see him they were being deliberately put off with Jonathan; that Jonathan,



who, in point of fact was merely anxious to save him (and incidentally his patients) from trouble, was undermining his reputation by the sinister methods which Craig had employed thirty years before.

"People may think they're getting the better of me," he would remark with apparent irrelevance. "I may be a back-number, but I've still got a pair of eyes in my head, huh?"

Fortunately, even for these grievances, his memory was short; and, strangely enough, his mind, though incapable of sustained thought or reasoning, was as useful as ever to Jonathan in those instinctive diagnostic divinations, the product of half a century's unconscious experience, in which neither thought nor reason were concerned. Faced, amid his ramblings, with a clinical picture suddenly presented, the old man was still able to interpret it and to offer valuable suggestions for its treatment. In doubtful cases Jonathan could still rely on a judgment which, even if it were empirical, was less fallible than his own.

For the rest, Jonathan's principal anxiety was that Rachel should not be made too painfully aware of this decline. By tacit agreement neither of them ever referred to it directly. That she realized what was happening, he could not doubt; for now she habitually referred all matters of real importance to Jonathan, deliberately concealing them from her father's notice. And this new attitude filled him with an awkward tenderness mingled with admiration. She knew, this dark, silent girl, that

the end was not far off; but what would become of her when it came was more than either of them dared or was able to imagine.

As far as Jonathan himself was concerned the future now looked reasonably secure. Harold, in spite of athletic and amorous diversions, was taking his medical examinations in his stride with the speed and precision of a practised hurdler. He had, unlike Jonathan, to whom each of these obstacles had been hedged with spiritual terrors, a good "head" for examinations; a manner that predisposed examiners in his favour, and a faculty for expressing himself with clarity both orally and on paper.

Mr. Dakers had judged rightly when he put all his money (or rather Jonathan's) on Harold. From childhood Harold had been "cut out" for success; he had in him the seeds of triumphant "performance" as distinguished from "existence"; and though a cool and, perhaps, somewhat patronizing reservation in his attitude toward their plans for partnership was casting a shadow of doubt on Jonathan's hopes and ambitions, he had the consolation of knowing that Harold, once qualified, would not need his help: a sorry consolation, for he had regarded the prospect of helping Harold and working along with him as the principal objective and reward of his Wednesford struggles.

Those struggles continued in spite of his success, or because of it. As long as Jonathan had been content to keep going in the station to which it had pleased God to

call old Hammond, Craig had been willing to regard him, not, of course, benevolently, but with the indifference due to his insignificance. Craig had also benefited by the boom in local industries. In Jonathan's fourth year he launched out into a four-seater motor-car whose polished nickel put Jonathan's muddy bicycle more than ever to shame. Apart from George Hingston, to whom such a form of conveyance seemed natural, Craig was the only motor-owner in Wednesford, and this vehicle, which was as noisy and malodorous as were all the earlier members of its species, carried him in triumphant evidence of supremacy through the narrow High Street to the Hospital, and to the neighbouring golf-course. If only as an advertisement it was worth the fortune which he was reputed to have paid for it, though old Hammond, wise in horse-flesh and contemptuous of these new methods of locomotion, was savagely convinced that the experiment must end in disaster.

But now, thanks to the painful economies which had enabled him to buy instruments and his confidence in the support of John Morse, Jonathan was beginning to invade the Cottage Hospital. This institution had been founded, among other benefactions, by Joseph Hingston, in aid of his Baronetcy, and of the poorer people of the Wednesford district. Having built it, a monument in terra-cotta that advertised his good heart and his bad taste to every beholder, Sir Joseph had, characteristically—for nobody knew where goodness of heart might profitably end better than he did—neglected to

endow it. Its running expenses were somewhat flimsily supported by local activities which permitted the Rector to show his public spirit and the talented Miss Gaiges their persons in sermons and house-to-house collections, in concerts and bazaars. Unfortunately, in spite of these efforts, the Hospital remained chronically in debt; and the working-class people, for whom it had been intended, were rarely allowed to occupy its beds, since the Committee was forced by the scantiness of funds, to make a charge for their maintenance. So, while the fiction that it was a charitable institution worthy of support was generally accepted, the Hospital had become, in fact, a private nursing-home maintained at the public expense for the benefit of the middle-classes, usually Craig's patients, and for the performance of what old Hammond sardonically called Craig's Practical Courses in Vivisection and Experimental Surgery.

With the exception of John Morse, all the members of the Committee were in Craig's pocket. The Rector, Gaige, and Clarke, the solicitor, were grateful patients; and Wheeler, the chemist, whose bills for medicaments and dressings were paid without question, was bound to Craig's service by interests more material; while George Higgins, the remaining member, was naturally hostile to anyone connected with Hammond. As a result of this family conspiracy, the perfect fairness of which not one of the committee-men questioned, Craig's fortunate patients were supplied with food, dressings and nursing at a charge suggested by Craig himself, and so moderate

(thanks to the public subscriptions) that they were able to face Craig's fees, which were by no means moderate, in addition.

To Jonathan, fresh from the North Bromwich Hospitals, where all suffering humanity was welcome to receive the highest medical and surgical skill for nothing, this arrangement seemed monstrously cynical. No man or woman of the working class, among whom he practised, could afford to pay medical fees in addition to those which the hospital committee exacted for their keep. That was why men like Lucas, who thought of medicine simply in terms of money, had never used the Hospital, and had joined with old Hammond, who avoided it for personal and more creditable reasons, in leaving the field open to Craig. Faced by this obstacle, Jonathan decided that in all cases of his own admitted to the Hospital he would forego his fees, trusting to the influence of John Morse to see that the committee's charges were moderate.

Yet, even so, his troubles had only begun. He had not reckoned, first of all, with the repugnance and suspicion with which the working-people of Wednesford looked on surgery. A great part of his personal popularity and of the distrust with which, in those strata of society, Craig and Monaghan were regarded, was due to the fact that he didn't practise it. "Butcher Craig," was a by-word among them: "Craig's a sight too fond of the knife," they used to say. And even in cases where this prejudice had been overcome, he found himself up

against another: the obstructions of the nursing staff.

The Matron, Miss Jessell, a dour, desiccated woman of fifty, trained in Craig's own London hospital, who had been flattered by the vicarious social distinction which her association with Craig and his well-to-do patients gave her, obviously regarded Jonathan as an outsider. Her subordinates, who had been chosen by Craig, took their colour from her. All of them adopted Jonathan's methods, which happened to be relatively modern, under protest.

"Dr. Craig never does things like this," the matron would say.

"But that's how I want it done," Jonathan good-humouredly protested.

"If you order it, Dr. Dakers, I'll do it that way," she answered sourly. "But I'd rather have it put down in black and white. I think, if you don't mind, you'd better write your orders on the case-sheet."

And the patient, timidly listening to this conversation, would imagine himself the victim of some heartless experiment. Irritated beyond measure by these obstructions and suggestions of disparagement, Jonathan was helpless. He couldn't fight women, even if those women were merely hostages set in the forefront of Craig's attack. He kept his temper and held his peace, continuing steadily to press his policy of penetration.

At first the cases which he sent to the hospital were of a minor importance; tonsillectomies, adenoids and so on,

that required a short period of anæsthesia which Lucas, faintly fired by Jonathan's example and eager to pick up an odd half-guinea (which Jonathan was often compelled to provide out of his own pocket) could manage without danger to the patient's life. Lucas was an abominable anæsthetist, too timid to keep the patients properly "under", with the result that they invariably suffered from shock. However, until Harold was qualified, Jonathan knew that he would have to put up with Lucas, and in spite of the matron's doubts they none of them died. But as soon as Craig began to see strange faces in the wards, he devised a new plan for freezing Jonathan out, which was nothing less than filling all the available beds, and keeping them filled, with his own patients.

He embarked, in fact, on a veritable orgy of major and minor surgery, finding symptoms requiring urgent surgical interference ("Interference? huh?" old Hammond grunted bitterly) in patients whose chronic ailments he had been treating for years. In this period of intensive surgical activity the incidence of appendicitis among Craig's patients became so alarming that not one of them felt safe. The disease assumed the proportions of an epidemic. The most innocent dyspeptics found their way to the theatre; and all of them, thanks to the healthiness of the accused organ and its surrounding tissues, made such good recoveries that appendectomy became first a fashion, then a habit, and ultimately a staple subject of tea-table conversation in the Wolverbury Road. It was only when, by a further logical

metamorphosis, it finally became a joke, that Craig, who, whatever else he may have been was no fool, discovered the gall-bladder, which kept him going and the Hospital full for another twelve months. For periods of decadence, when the supply of surgical material ran short, he contrived the custom of sending his patients into hospital "for observation," which, if less profitable, was almost equally impressive, supporting the theory that, great surgeon though he was, he never operated except in cases of sheer necessity, and, what was more important, keeping Jonathan away.

Distrusting Lucas's skill as an anæsthetist, Jonathan continued to send all cases demanding major surgery to Lloyd Moore in North Bromwich; a fact upon which Craig, in confidence, took care to enlarge.

"I'm thankful to see," he would say, "that the young man realizes his limitations. Slicing out tonsils, my dear Mrs. Perry, is a simple matter. Unless the patients die under the anæsthetic it can't do them much harm. I admit that Dakers shows his sense in that. The only thing that makes me anxious is this. Some day he may be faced with a grave emergency, and Hammond is so vindictive that Dakers won't dare to ask me for the help which I should be only too delighted to give him."

"How generous you are, doctor!" Mrs. Perry beamingly replied. "After all you've suffered from that dreadful old man."

"It's not a question of generosity," Craig modestly



told her. "It's sheer humanity. These youngsters fresh from hospital are so terribly confident. Now Dakers, by all accounts, is a well-meaning young fellow; but good intentions . . ." He shook his head despondently. A wry smile twisted his ugly mouth. "By the way, if the Rector wants to run over to Lichfield next week," he went on, "remember that the car's at your disposal. The fresh air would do you good too, Mrs. Perry. You're looking rather off colour. If you don't mind, I think I'll leave a prescription for a tonic for you with Wheeler. Nonsense! It's no trouble at all"—the brogue was deliberate but charming—"You're far too valuable to all of us to be neglected." Which was true. Mrs. Perry's value to him was above rubies. Her gratitude impelled her to do exactly what Craig expected of her. At a mothers' meeting next day, fortified by her tonic, she conveyed Craig's fears for humanity to Mrs. Clarke and Mrs. Gaige.

"I *do* hope," she said, "that Dr. Dakers won't be rash. If only he hadn't come to Wednesford with such unfortunate introductions he might be made to realize how kind and helpful Dr. Craig would be. Unfortunately that dreadful old man, who is *known* to be an atheist—he hasn't set foot in any place of worship for forty years—is bound to influence him."

"My husband rather likes Dr. Dakers," said Mrs. Clarke, whose husband always liked potential clients.

"We *all* like him, I'm sure, and we're all sorry for him," Mrs. Perry protested.

"That Hammond girl likes him anyway," Mrs. Gaige maintained. "She's a sly one, she is!"

"A doctor ought to be married," said Mrs. Perry firmly. "He owes it to the community. I've told him so."

"Married?" said Mrs. Gaige darkly. "I wasn't speaking of *marriage*."

"Oh, you *don't* say so!" Mrs. Clarke gasped. "Well, now I come to think of it . . ."

"Who says I said anything?" asked Mrs. Gaige, with righteous severity. "I only say that I should be sorry for my girls to associate with a young man of that type. He's only been once to our home. But that once was enough for mother! In my opinion, Mrs. Perry, Mr. Dakers is no gentleman."

"Well, doctors rarely are," said Mrs. Perry superbly. "Outside the Indian Medical Service, which is quite different you know, and apart from dear Dr. Craig, I've known very few who were. However, we can't quarrel with God for making us what we are. All that *I'm* anxious about is that this young man should not be allowed to become a danger to our poor dear people. I know that the matron is frightened of what may happen. I only hope that someone will have the courage to advise him, before it's too late, not to be rash."

In the event, the question of prudence or rashness did not arise. Jonathan's first major operation was thrust upon him in the shape of an emergency that offered no alternatives. The patient was a young girl

of seventeen who did sewing, on her own account, in one of the mass of red brick houses, called Higgins's Buildings, that towered so nobly above the valley of the Stour.

In this wretched warren, where five or six families, including that of Ada, the Hammonds' maid, occupied the space which, in a less enlightened age, had sufficed for one, Jonathan had a monopoly of practice as complete as Craig's in the Wolverbury Road. Ada, a vigorous partisan, had seen to that; and though the practice in Higgins's Buildings was worth extremely little, because the tenants were too poor to pay doctors' bills, and rather less because the defective roofs and walls and drainage system of that picturesque mass conduced to careless living, dirt and disease, Jonathan, out of sheer familiarity had become attached, in an honorary capacity, to this group of families, knowing not only their names and faces but also their lives' histories and much of the deplorable social conditions under which they lived.

The sempstress, Lily Rudge, was herself no stranger to him. Some weeks before, loudly sponsored by Ada, she had presented herself at the surgery with a whitlow, a fore-finger poisoned by a needle-prick, in which the common bacteria of suppuration had run riot until the frail, anæmic creature, worn with pain and labour, starved of food, air and light, drooped like a sick lily indeed. Jonathan had incised the finger, luckily before the poison had involved the tendon sheaths, and sent the girl home with the iron tonic that her blanched blood-stream needed and the usual vain counsel of perfection:

rest, fresh air, good food—all three unknown and unobtainable in Higgins's Buildings.

After that he had seen no more of her, until, one evening, she returned to the surgery and handed him, blushing, a pathetic, grubby florin. The payment was startling, if only as the first that had ever burst from Higgins's Buildings. He patted the child's shoulder; refused it, telling her that she had much better spend it on the food that she obviously needed; that he himself, indeed, would be inconvenienced if she would wait till the Christmas bills were sent out. He also seized the opportunity of getting a little more iron into her with a bottle of medicine which she accepted unwillingly.

"I cor' abear the thought of being in debt, doctor," she said, her bloodless cheeks flushed with anxiety. "You take the money now, doctor, please do! I might be tempted to spend it; and then I should be afraid to call yo' in if so be as I'm took bad again."

Jonathan continued, good-humouredly, to refuse; and that, perhaps, was the reason why, some weeks later, the sister with whom Lily Rudge lived sent for him so late. He found the poor child stretched out with a rigid abdomen, knees raised, a falling temperature, a rising pulse: all signs of some abdominal catastrophe.

The history as dragged from confused, unwilling tongues, pointed to a suppurating, possibly a perforated appendix, which should have been dealt with, probably, a week earlier, though the girl had only dropped her work for three days.

"Why didn't you send for me before?" he rated her sister.

"She wouldn't let me, doctor. She said it would pass off."

"Pass off! Couldn't you see for yourself how ill she was?"

"Yo' cor' insense Lily, doctor. She's that obstinate! Yo' cor' meddle an' mak in her affairs. And she was thinking of the brass. She knowed she owed you a bill for two lots of physic and attendants already."

"Oh, damn the bill!" Jonathan paced the narrow landing in doubt. Whatever the trouble were—and, at this late stage the rigidity and tenderness made it impossible to palpate or percuss—immediate exploration was indicated. How could he run the risk of sending her in to Prince's to Lloyd Moore, to be jolted over ten miles of roads rutted by heavy traffic? Even removal to the Hospital, four hundred yards away, was not without danger. Lucas, in a case of this kind which might demand prolonged anæsthesia, was not to be trusted. Yet action must be taken and at once. He rang up Craig. Craig, who was playing bridge at the George Hingstons', referred him to Monaghan. Monaghan had just been called to a midwifery case, but promised to meet him at the Hospital in an hour's time.

The local police station supplied him with a stretcher. Jonathan himself, trusting no other hands, carried the patient downstairs.

"I dae' want to go there, doctor," she entreated. "Oh

I'd liever die here, not in the 'orspital! It bain't so bad as you think," she added, contradictorily. "Do give us another drop of physic. It's only summat want's shifting."

"Now don't be stupid, Lily," he told her. "Put your arms round my neck. I'll try not to hurt you when I lift. If I do, just sing out, and I'll go easy. Up you come! Don't you trust me?"

"Oh yes, I trust you, doctor. It bain't that."

Her body was light as a child's; her head, fallen on Jonathan's shoulder, exhaled a smell of fever and the characteristic breath-odour of an abdominal case; but the stairs of Higgins's Buildings, fashioned to accommodate the tripping steps of fine Augustan ladies, were wide and easily graded, so that he reached the street, where the stretcher was waiting hedged by a gaping crowd of urchins, without difficulty. Ada, whose night-out grandeur gave her authority, scattered the children with cuffs and curses: "Yo' mischieful rodneys, gereway out o' this!" She kept the stretcher company like an armed escort all the way to the Hospital.

"You've had my message?" Jonathan asked the matron, who showed surprise to see them.

"Yes, sir,"—the formality was unusual—"but I'm sorry I haven't got a bed"

"You'll have to have one. Please hurry up!" said Jonathan determinedly.

"Dr. Craig is sending in a case for observation to-morrow."

"Then the observation case will have to wait. This one is urgent."

"I can't admit another patient without Dr. Craig's permission."

"You'll have to. No nonsense, please, matron! Is the theatre heated?"

"Naturally I took no steps," the matron began, "until . . ."

"Then take them at once," said Jonathan shortly. "Kindly prepare for a laparotomy."

The change from his usual tone of politeness was so impressive that the woman obeyed sulkily. Jonathan heard her whispering protests to her staff in the background. In the middle of the preparations Monaghan arrived. He shook hands with Jonathan effusively, and joked with the matron with whom he was obviously on terms of the closest intimacy. Jonathan explained his case; the other raised his eyebrows. "What's her heart like?" he asked. "You'd better see," Jonathan told him. "Pretty rocky, old fellow," Monaghan announced when the auscultation was over. "It'll have to be ether. Rather a chancy business, eh?"

"Of course you'll have to be careful."

He would be careful; Jonathan was sure of that. False though he might be, Monaghan was no fool. His precautions were businesslike and methodical; a complete battery of cardiac stimulants stood at his left hand ready for emergencies. Lily Rudge gave Jonathan a wan smile that belied her frightened eyes.

"Cheer up, old girl," he said. "Go to sleep quietly. When you wake up it'll all be over."

The air of the badly lighted theatre was sharp with ether. The patient's breathing grew stertorous, then softened, became regular. Monaghan knew his job. With one finger of the hand that held the mask he lifted an eyelid—just for the fraction of a second. "She'll do," he said. The sister, her prejudices now submerged in the routine of preparation, unwound the bandages that swathed the tense abdomen. A new smell, iodine, crossed the fumes of ether. Upon its bronze stain, which gave the girl's pallid skin a silken sheen like that of a Red Indian's, Jonathan's eyes traced the imaginary line of his incision. McBurney's point . . . The child was nothing but a sack of bones; her waist, extended, thin as a flower's stalk. "Poor little devil!" he thought. He said: "All ready, Monaghan?"

"O.K. I think she's quite relaxed now. Go ahead."

Jonathan dipped his gloved fingers in the tray and picked up his virgin scalpel. The thin tissues parted, almost bloodlessly, beneath the blade's convexity. In theory the abdominal wall should be composed of well-defined layers; muscles, with fibres oblique, transverse and vertical, layers of fascia, and then the peritoneal sac. But this abdominal wall was no thicker than a dense parchment. Carefully though he went, he was through it before he knew. Then came a welling of pus. It was as he had imagined. A broken abscess, originating in the appendix, whose matting of peritoneal adhesions



had been unable to stand the pressure any longer. In another night—in the space of a few hours, maybe—the infection would have become general, the patient would have been done for. Thank heaven, he thought, I didn't take the risk of sending her to North Bromwich! And even now. . .

All he could do was to swab out the cavity and drain it; to search for the gangrenous appendix would have been as difficult as it was useless.

"Have you no tubes bigger than these?" he asked the matron.

"I have some of Dr. Craig's."

"Let's have them at once."

She looked doubtfully at Monaghan, who nodded approval: "Of course, matron—of course. . . . You'd better hurry up, Dakers. She won't stand much more," he said.

"All right. I've finished," Jonathan told him. "She'll do."

He had finished; though, God knew, he had done little enough. As they stood together inside the screens in the surgical ward waiting for the patient to come round, Monaghan whispered: "I don't much like the look of her. A pity you didn't open her up before."

"I only saw her two hours ago," Jonathan told him, too anxious for asperity.

"Bad luck!" said Monaghan. "These people are the divil an' all! Well, well . . . God knows! Let's trust in the Providence that sees to fools." He sighed

sympathetically. The sympathy seemed genuine enough.

Providence, in this case, appeared to smile on Jonathan's intentions. For four days the girl's temperature remained normal, though the pulse was still too rapid for his liking. Jonathan visited the hospital in every moment that he could spare. On the fifth evening an urgent message from the matron summoned him. The patient had begun to hiccough. A sinister sign! Nothing that he could suggest would stop those terrifying automatic contractions of the diaphragm. Hour after hour that shrill sound, like the crowing of a cock, went on. It was as though the unconscious muscle were possessed by a devil, inspired with a malignant alien vitality of which the patient herself knew nothing. She lay there, shaken by hiccoughs, neither knowing nor caring.

"It's not for me to suggest," said the matron; "but don't you think it would be better to call in Dr. Craig?"

Jonathan telephoned to Lloyd Moore, and that knight-errant, abandoning a private engagement that would have given him a hundred guineas, came dashing out to Wednesford.

"Bad luck, my boy!" he said. "You'd better try injections of Pituitrin."

Next morning, when the gigantic syrens of the Wolverbury Steel Works saluted an invisible dawn, Lily Rudge died.

"Bad luck, Dakers," said Monaghan, meeting Jonathan in the High Street. "Of course, you were per-

fectly right," he added; "but it 'ld have been better for you if she'd died at home, without operation."

His shrewd tongue spoke the truth. Perhaps it would have been better for everybody—Craig always excepted. Not that Craig's attitude was ever anything but professional. Since that unsavoury lawsuit with Hammond twenty years ago, now fortunately forgotten, Craig had always prided himself on the high ethical standards with which he heaped coals of fire upon the heads of meaner practitioners, such as Lucas and Jonathan. These standards, however, did not prevent his discussing Jonathan's case, in a friendly and quite unbiassed way, with his own patients, particularly those who happened to be on the committee of his dear Hospital, whose reputation, for which he was so jealous, had been adversely affected by the calamity.

"Of course," he told Mrs. Perry, "I'm not in a position to judge. I never saw the patient. Monaghan tells me that she should have been operated on much earlier. Please understand I am casting no reflections on Dr. Dakers. But surgery, as I've learnt by bitter experience, is not to be entered on lightly. I happen to be lucky as well. I take no personal credit for the fact that since I've been in Wednesford I've operated on more than fifty cases of appendicitis without losing one of them. I'm only thankful to admit that Providence has been kind to me."

"More than fifty cases!" Mrs. Perry gasped. "Isn't that wonderful?"

"Good luck," Craig corrected, modestly, "and, perhaps, the fruits of experience. We are always learning."

His modest reticence prevented him from mentioning the fact that the bulk of the appendixes which he had removed were healthy or in a state of quiescence; nor did he include in his statistics the number of those who had died without operation; but the one with which he had supplied Mrs. Perry was enough for her purpose and his.

"Whatever can we do," she wailed, "to protect our poor people? There ought to be some law to prevent a boy like Dr. Dakers operating. Only think, Dr. Craig has dealt with more than fifty cases of this kind and never lost one . . . not one, Mrs. Gaige! And I happen to know, though he didn't tell me so himself, that Dr. Monaghan realized, from the first moment, that it was too late. That young woman should have been operated on days before, by some really experienced surgeon. Of course we can all of us be sorry for this young man's ignorance; but the conceit that made him handle a serious matter without experienced help is quite another matter. It's a danger to the community, as I've already told Mrs. Hingston."

And it wasn't only Mrs. Hingston that she told. For the better part of a month the incident furnished Mrs. Perry with food for the indignation on which her dyspepsia nourished itself. Wherever he went, Jonathan's sense of his own failure was aggravated by an atmosphere of suspicion, if not of hostility, among Craig's

patients. Not even Lloyd Moore's assurance that he had acted for the best could remove that inward discomfort. Used as he was to spiritual loneliness—for Harold was now so busy at Hospital that he rarely saw him, Edie, at her Sussex school, was more remotely star-like than ever, and old Hammond could only envisage the incident as an unsuccessful minor engagement in the war with Craig—Jonathan, in those bad days, would have given his soul for a confidant.

He found one, of a sort, in Rachel Hammond: a spirit as lonely as his own. It was her influence, if the word may be justly applied to an emanation so static, that restored, in this period of uncertainty, his sense of values. Except during the afternoon hour which they spent together daily in the dispensary, he scarcely ever noticed her; her words were so few, her movements so soft and unobtrusive. It was she who supplied, as he knew but hardly realized, the creature comforts which made his life in Wednesford so different from that of a bachelor in lodgings, so much more homely, if the truth be told, than any he had previously known in hospital or at Chadshill. Her care anticipated his needs and humoured his preferences. She knew them through and through, even more minutely than he did, being accustomed, almost from childhood, to the management of a house in which there was no other woman of her own class. The very disorder of the doctor's existence had made her mind more orderly, more adaptable. Nor had her training been only domestic. She was the one

living person, as Jonathan had soon discovered, who understood the working of her father's practice. Her methodical mind was the cement that held it together in the state of disintegration in which Jonathan had found it; and even now, when his energy had reinforced the crumbling fabric, its new stability continued to depend on her. Slow-spoken and slow to speak as she was, it was her knowledge of methods and circumstances that gave co-ordination to the machine which Jonathan's energy animated. In a hundred daily details of practice he relied upon her judgment and experience. She was as essential to his life as the food he hurriedly swallowed, and as little noticed.

The Rudge disaster drew them closer together. To Rachel he poured forth the flood of his fearful uncertainties. She received them almost in silence, as was her wont, but with a silence that was more consoling and more heartening than any fluent condolence. Her very impassivity had a stabilising influence. It was vast and infinitely receptive, unmoved on the surface yet deeply stirred by sympathy, recalling always that image of a marble maternal deity which had come to his mind when first he compared her beauty with Edie's Tanagran graces. He came to her as, in a Pagan age, a suppliant might have approached some placid, sculptured divinity in search of oracular direction. Yet, when she spoke, the oracle was sufficiently human, echoing, as oracles were wont to do, the reasonable verdicts of the suppliant's mind.

"What would you do," she said, "if you had a case of the same kind to-morrow?"

"Exactly what I have done," he told her. "Every time!"

"Then why worry?"

"People are talking. Craig puts a false construction on everything, and everybody believes him."

"I don't believe him. I know that you were right. Not because I know *you*. The facts speak for themselves. You operated within an hour of seeing her first. You found what you expected. Sooner or later people will realize that. You're so impatient! What do you expect Craig to do? To go about Wednesford defending you? He's your opponent. If he could crush you out of existence to-morrow he'd do so. You may consider it a compliment that he's taking the trouble to make things hot for you. It only shows people who think, that you're someone to be reckoned with. By the way you're talking now it looks as if he were mistaken. I happen to know that he isn't. You're going to win in the end."

"Of course, I'm a damned coward. You're splendid," he told her.

And indeed she was splendid. The words of encouragement had brought colour to her cheeks and a dark flame into her eyes. That passion, so alien to her sombreness, transformed it. Her body glowed with an inward fire. She was flushed and breathless, generous, human, desirable. At that moment, moved by some-

thing more than gratitude, Jonathan could easily have taken her in his arms and kissed her, this present, warm incarnation of hope and courage. Why didn't he do so? The occasion was obvious. Yet, as they gazed at each other, waiting, as it seemed, for the instant when neither words nor silence should suffice to contain their emotion, he remembered a saying of Edie's: "But she's in love with you—Rachel Hammond I mean."—And the sudden vision of Edie speaking, the echo of her voice, swept the import of the words she had spoken out of his mind, recalling him, instantly, to that old and hopeless loyalty: compelling him, abashed, to surrender substance for shadow. The moment passed. Shaken, and even ashamed, Jonathan turned away his eyes, a triple traitor, to Rachel, to Edie and to himself.

"And don't forget," he heard Rachel saying, "if trouble crops up at the hospital, there's always John Morse."

Trouble? There was nothing but trouble. Yet still the practice grew . . .



## CHAPTER VII

### VENDETTA

So the year passed, and with it the scandal of Jonathan's surgical failure died down in spite of all Craig's efforts to keep it alive. His life at Wednesford, once so full of promise and adventure, was settling into a groove. The practice continued to keep pace with his growing reputation. Encouraged by Rachel's support, he persisted in his invasion of the Hospital, where Craig, who knew better than to squander his energy in fruitless opposition, was forced to accept his intrusion with a polite but heavily-armed neutrality. He knew now that Jonathan was too formidable an opponent to be dismissed with the contempt which he displayed towards Lucas. He had decided, it seemed, to bide his time and give the young man rope enough to hang himself with; and this charitable concession, like every other variation in Craig's policy, was minutely reflected in the expectant attitude of the matron, the nursing-staff, and the ladies of the Wolverbury Road.

This period of unrelieved, monotonous activity, this dull routine of medical commonplace, which was, indeed, the hardest part of the discipline of practice, put a heavy strain upon Jonathan's faith in his vocation. The spectacular aspirations of his student days were failing him,

one by one. Like a cavalryman, nursed in theories of rapid evolution, dismounted and faced by the stationary dullness of trench-life, he found himself denied all opportunity of high and swift adventure, a negligible unit condemned to take his part with thousands of others in a grinding war of attrition. Fired by Lloyd Moore's account of his own experience, he had looked on his period of probation at Wednesford as a mere prelude to wider and nobler activities in which not only himself but Harold would take part. But Harold, already approaching his final year, had seen enough of general practice in his visits to Jonathan to realize that a career so pedestrian was not for him. Its hardly-won rewards would never satisfy his expensive tastes; and even if, as a matter of immediate convenience, he might consent to grace, for a short time, the place that Jonathan was keeping warm for him, he had no intention of burying himself in a hole like Wednesford. Though Harold spared Jonathan the shock of telling him this in so many words, and even continued to speak of their partnership as a natural sequel to his qualifying, Jonathan realized these reservations and even, to his sorrow, approved them.

He still regarded Harold as a superior being, too brilliant to be sacrificed on the altar of fraternal devotion; but the certainty of Harold's ultimate defection made the future look as empty as the uninspiring present: a present of stale routine in Hammond's little surgery, where endless processions of club-patients presented a series of almost identical complaints; of night-

long vigils in stuffy bedrooms where haggard women moaned in child-birth; of daily visiting-rounds in which he tramped or pedalled his battered bicycle through the mud, the sleet, the fog and the drizzle of a Black-Country winter. And when the pressure of work was over, what relaxation awaited him? Nothing but the over-heated living-room in which old Hammond warmed his ancient bones and spun his webs of garrulous reminiscence; the sombre silences of Rachel, sitting in her corner; or, once a week, marking the unbelievable passage of slow time, the evening visits of John Morse, who sat and smoked and spat and listened stolidly to the doctor's interminable ramblings.

Among other signs of decadence, Jonathan found that he was becoming unable to read. Determined that his mind should not wholly run to seed, he braced himself to a renewal of his studies in philosophy, schooling it, as a disciplinary duty, in the complications of Neo-Platonism, wrestling, first, then dreaming, with Plotinus and Porphyry, until his eyelids itched and he could neither see nor think. Then, as a rule, his mind would fall back on memories of Edie—more distant now than ever, for, tired of scholastic life, she had decided abruptly to sink her savings in a new venture, the acquisition of an additional gymnastic diploma in Ling's own country at the University of Lund, in Sweden. As far as Jonathan was concerned it might as well have been the University of Kamchatka.

That Autumn, suddenly, Medicine became involved

in Politics. The Liberal Government had carried through Lloyd George's bill for National Medical Insurance. The whole tradition of Medical Practice was cast, the newspapers agreed, into the melting-pot. The existing Friendly Societies, those "clubs" that gave Jonathan the bulk of his income, were to be merged in a larger body, state-controlled, within which not only their existing members but every wage-earner of moderate means, including the black-coated lower middle-classes, the principal victims of Craig's ledgers and of his knife and the mainstay of his beloved Hospital, were to be gathered.

Even if Craig had not been a Conservative he would have opposed the new Insurance Act. By a single blow the bulk of his private practice, the respectable folk whose five-shilling visits paid for the motor-car in which he cut a figure among his guinea patients were to be snatched from his clutches. It was hardly as bad as that, perhaps; the new insured were to be allowed free choice of a doctor; but Craig professed to think it was even worse; his conservative nose scented mischief more unsavoury, another invasion of the rights of private property, the basic foundations, as Joe Hingston put it, of our social system. Nerved by his consciousness of all the best people's approval and heated with his own prejudice, Craig threw himself into the front of the opposition as organized by the local branch of the British Medical Association, of which he was President and Jonathan a member.

Simultaneously he became not only friendly but positively flattering to all his opponents. Lucas, who had neither club-patients nor aristocrats on his books and stood to lose everything, was easily alarmed. Jonathan, who was not only convinced of the measure's justice, but also, as an established club-doctor, likely to gain by it, and distrustful, in any case, of Craig's unusual flatteries, stood for the reform. Craig, and, by inference, the whole Wolverbury Road was scandalized. Jonathan appeared to be not only a Liberal (which was bad enough in all conscience) but a traitor to his profession and his class. As a member of the Association he owed it to his professional brethren to assist in preserving a united front. Craig's sense of brotherly solidarity was shocked by Jonathan's luke-warmth; so far he hadn't attended a single meeting of protest. The time had come, Craig said, for Jonathan to make his position clear. He did so. In a polite note he resigned his membership of the Association. Shocked by this defection, Craig passed from recriminations to threats. He buttonholed Jonathan in the hospital lobby.

"I might have expected that you'd be a black-leg, Dakers," he said. "But let me tell you this: you stand to lose more patients by this Act than anyone else in Wednesford. Remember, you'll no longer have any monopoly of the clubs. Patients can choose their own doctor, and Wednesford is generally, thank God, conservative. The people don't like your attitude—I tell you this for your own good—and if this Act is carried

through they'll have an opportunity of showing it. Kindly remember that!"

"And why not?" Jonathan asked him. "Freedom of choice is one of the best things in the Act. I strongly approve of it."

"I thought," Craig blustered, his Irish temper getting the better for once of his Scotch caution, "I thought you were merely a perverse obstructionist. I was mistaken. You're speaking now like a damned fool."

It was a touchy moment that might have ended in unseemly disaster, but Jonathan's sense of humour helped him out of it. However unreasonably—and his argument was specious—it was obviously Craig who was frightened. Not without cause, as the event proved; for when the Act became law and the insured persons had made their choice, Jonathan found himself with a list of patients that was longer than Craig's, Monaghan's and Lucas's put together.

From that moment it was war to the knife. Craig was not the man to relax a vendetta that he had once undertaken. His fury compelled him—or rather it compelled poor Monaghan—to forget that he was supposed to be a gentleman. The time for insinuations whispered in anxiety rather than anger was over. Jonathan no longer appeared as an object of pity, the guileless and, unfortunately, the inexperienced dupe of old Hammond's machinations, but as the ungodly and unscrupulous foe of all established things, a danger not only to his unlucky patients but to society.

The fact that the ungodly Jonathan flourished like a green bay-tree, as shown by his purchase of an eight horse-power car, whose single cylinder advertised itself by more noise than Craig's four, showed that the basic foundations of Sir Joseph's social system were in greater danger than ever. That motor-car, which, purchased with difficulty, had become the apple of Jonathan's eye, was an offence to God and man, destroying the peace of every street it invaded with fumes of burnt oil and an exhaust that pounded like a water-hammer. If it were not over-lubricated it grew hot and gave up the ghost, its inadequate bearings threatening to seize. Its radiator, which Jonathan had to fill up from casual sources ten times a day, steamed like a samovar: he could have made tea from it at any moment. The ignition was supplied, through a commutator to which short-circuits were second nature, from a wet—a too-wet-battery, carried on the running-board, that had to be re-charged every fortnight. Its lion-hearted engine would "negotiate" (as the salesman put it) any ordinary hill, in time, and with coaxing. Unfortunately one or two of the Wednesford hills were extraordinary; the bottom gear was too high for them—and Jonathan was therefore forced to ascend them backwards, on reverse.

Even so, this fantastic vehicle stank—all too literally—in Craig's nostrils. If he could have run Jonathan down without damaging his own head-lamps he would have done so. Failing this violent means of expressing his jealousy, he entered into an unholy offensive alliance

with the despised Lucas, persuading him to use the Hospital under cover of his own help and experience, trying to establish a new dummy of a surgical reputation as a reply to Jonathan's, excusing Lucas's errors and lauding his imaginary achievements as often as he could.

That wasn't very often; for Lucas, even when stiffened by Craig and Monaghan, was too timid and resigned to humility to be of much use. But Craig possessed another and a more effective weapon of obstruction in his position as Medical Officer of Health, an appointment which he had wrested from old Hammond, with George Higgins's aid, at the time of their separation.

Up to this point Craig had taken his sanitary duties, and their substantial emoluments, rather lightly. But any stick was good enough for beating Jonathan, and an epidemic of diphtheria, which swept through Wednesford in the following Spring, gave him a legitimate opportunity to interfere with Jonathan's practice.

Craig had the legal right, as Medical Officer of Health, of inspecting all the infectious cases notified in Wednesford. Not only did he exercise it, wherever Jonathan was concerned; he also presumed upon it by dictating treatment, by criticising Jonathan's methods of isolation, and by bullying the unfortunate patients who happened to be under Jonathan's charge. Against these interferences Jonathan had no remedy, and, indeed, no consolation except the fact that Craig's officiousness certainly didn't increase his popularity. It was only when the aggregation of pin-pricks and obstructions so



exasperated him that they interfered with the proper conduct of his cases that he was forced to retaliate.

He prepared an official memorandum, addressed to Craig as Medical Officer of the Wednesford Urban District, pointing out that the origin of the whole epidemic was nothing more nor less than the deplorable sanitary and housing conditions of the slums in the lower part of the town, and particularly of Higgins's Buildings, in which the first cases had appeared. He suggested that it was Craig's duty, as medical officer, to declare Higgins's Buildings unfit for human habitation, which they obviously were and had been for more than twenty years.

Old Hammond was delighted by this show of feather, not because he considered housing conditions important or diphtheria a preventable disease, but because the Buildings happened to be the property of his enemy and nephew George Higgins. For precisely the same reason Jonathan's memorandum put Craig in a quandary. If the Buildings had belonged to John Morse he would have condemned them long ago and advertized his righteousness in doing so. But George Higgins was not only a staunch supporter of his on the Hospital Committee but also one of his most profitable patients, a wealthy and chronic asthmatic, good for at least two consultations a week all the year round. Quietly and deliberately Craig suppressed Jonathan's report; and nothing happened.

But Jonathan had not finished. On Morse's advice

he sent a copy of his memorandum to the District Council direct, and a duplicate to Dale, the County Medical Officer. This time the question could not be shelved so easily. Rachel, from her point of vantage in the bedroom window, reported a feverish coming and going in Craig's surgery; of Clarke, the council's secretary; of the sanitary inspector; of George Higgins, who happened to be chairman of the council himself.

The matter was discussed at a meeting of the Sanitary Committee from which pressmen were excluded. An order for a special inspection and report, which Craig had no alternative but to obey, arrived from Stafford. He paid an official visit to Higgins's Buildings, spreading terror among the tenants, disclaiming all personal desire to embarrass them, suggesting, quite truthfully, that Jonathan was responsible for the interference.

"Your friend Dr. Dakers," he said, "has demanded that the Buildings shall be condemned and pulled down."

"We'm all right here, gaffer," they told him. "Where shall us find another house if they turn us out? There bain't no other housen empty this side of Wolverbury. Where can us go to? That's what we want to know!"

"You'd better ask Dr. Dakers," Craig answered sympathetically. "It's he who's responsible. This is his doing, not mine."

For a month black looks met Jonathan in Higgins's Buildings. Even the death of Lily Rudge was recalled

against him. These people clung to their age-foul building, with its leaking roof, its floors crumbling with dry-rot, its drains that discharged their ordure into the foetid subsoil of the cellars, like rats to a sewer. That monstrous, dark, insanitary barrack was their home; many of them had been born in it and knew no other; it was as much part of their existence as a snail-shell of a snail's; its dirt and miasmas had entered into their lives as the natural conditions of their human heritage. However clearly Jonathan explained to them the dangers with which this squalor beset them, they would not, and indeed could not, understand.

"You're represented on the District Council," he told them. "You have a right to expect from them decent housing conditions. The Council has power to erect new cottages. It's their duty to do so when old ones are condemned."

But Higgins's Buildings were not condemned. To cover his face (and his friend George Higgins's) Craig was forced to report that conditions were not what they might be and recommend a series of minor repairs; and since Craig was known as a reliable officer at Stafford, his recommendations were accepted, and the basic foundations of the social system remained, if not unshaken, at least secure—much to the annoyance of George Higgins, who had to fork out the equivalent of a week's income for the repairs, and raised the rent of his tenants accordingly.

Before this incident Higgins had never spoken to

Jonathan. One morning, on his way to the Hospital, the foundryman accosted him, a pallid figure with the barrel-chest of the emphysematous and pouched malignant eyes. His voice was shrill and wheezy, and each new sentence precipitated a fit of coughing.

"So you're Dakers, are you?" he croaked at Jonathan. "You're the beggar that's been trying to do the dirty on me? You're the monkey that that old swine Hammond's been putting up to pull his bleeding chestnuts out of the fire! I know you now, I've seen your damned supercilious mug!" He choked at the end of this tribute to Jonathan's uneasy smile. "Look here," he went on as he recovered his breath. "Look here, you drop this quick, or I'll make you pay for it. I pull more strings in Wednesford than you give me credit for. If you put me to it, I can drive you out of the place. And tell that swine Hammond from me I'll dance on his grave before long. Mind out now! Don't say I've not warned you!"

So Higgins's Buildings remained, a whited sepulchre, and its inhabitants, reassured of a permanent squalor, took heart again, and had reason to thank Jonathan, even if they didn't do so, that their roofs leaked less scandalously than they had done for years.

It was curious, he often thought, how this block of masonry had insinuated itself into the centre of his life at Wednesford. He remembered how, on the evening of his arrival four years ago, that evening of buoyant hopes so incredibly distant, so feebly fulfilled, its pictur-

esque colour and outline, rising, warped and distorted like the heaped towers and battlements of a mediæval castle, had stirred his imagination. He remembered how the toothed string-courses, the bull's-eye casement-panes, the gracious arcs of fanlights had attracted him in the dusk; how, a few weeks later, he had singled them out for Harold's admiration. Of course he had been quick to realize the sinister contrast of these ornaments to the degradations within. Yet, even so, this unsavoury spot had been the nucleus around which his practice was centred, like the core of buried Etruscan masonry in an Italian hill-town. Hardly a day passed without his visiting some victim of the foul air that filled it, the infections that found a base and sanctuary within its walls like spores of malaria dormant in the human spleen. Its denizens had never paid him for his services; they were too poor to pay him. Yet, in these pitiful emergencies through which they displayed a realistic acceptance of life at its most damnable, he had always been conscious of a fortitude, a generosity which compelled his admiration. Even if they didn't pay him, they were loyal to him; and when Rachel, with a smile of understanding, gave him a message summoning him to their aid, he was always willing to answer it, feeling that there, at least, he was among friends.

The last year had added a new and fervent ally to the number of his patients in the Buildings, no other than Ada, the Hammonds' maid-servant, who, following the tradition of maid-servants in Wednesford, had

ended her career by an eleventh-hour marriage with a young man named Matthews employed in Higgins's foundry. There, four months later, her robust young life had given light—or as much of it as the bricked-up heritage of the window-tax permitted—to a normally healthy baby, whom she had christened Rachel, out of compliment to her mistress. So fair a beginning in circumstances so foul was distressing to Jonathan. He had entreated Rachel to use her influence with Ada and induce her to find a healthier spot for the child's upbringing. In vain. All the Wednesford builders were too busy erecting factories, and the employers too eager to snatch the firstfruit of the trade boom to think of houses. As long as business was brisk and workmen forthcoming it was not their concern to see how their people were housed.

"We're lucky to get what we've got, Miss Rachel," Ada had told her. "If it wasn't that Joe was a regular hand down at Higgins's foundry we couldn't ever have got married; and that 'ld have been a pretty kettle of fish! Besides, Miss, I fancy the Buildings. We was all dragged up in them, every one on us. There's always company there, and you'm never lonesome like."

Even if other roofs had been available Ada would not have moved a foot to find one. The influence of the place, a power incalculable by physical instruments of precision, had taken hold of her again. At the surgery, under Rachel's instruction, she had made an

admirable servant; intelligent, neat, and characteristically redolent of Sunlight soap. Her white starched apron stood out round her waist like a girdle of chastity; and though in this function it had proved less efficient than its mediæval equivalent, it had been the adequate symbol of a cleanly, well-ordered life. But no sooner had Joe Matthews made an honest woman of her and established her in Higgins's Buildings than she began to deteriorate. Her speech, her gait, her gestures, her whole nature underwent a change comparable to that induced by narcotic drugs and the toxins of certain systemic diseases. She became assimilated to her new surroundings by a kind of protective colour which made her indistinguishable from any of the slovenly figures about her. Before the first baby was weaned she came to tell Jonathan that another was "on the way," announcing the fact with a bitter fatalism.

"For goodness' sake, Ada, do try to get some fresh air," he told her.

Fresh air? That element did not exist within five miles of Wednesford; and even if it had existed Ada would not have gone to seek it. She sat, with her first baby in her arms, gossiping on the worn sandstone steps of Higgins's Buildings; and Jonathan, seeing her as he passed, reflected that her attitude wasn't so very different from that of his own mother, who clung, with the same fatalistic devotion to the loneliness of Chads-hill in a way that was even more pathetic than Ada's. Ada, at least, had for company the squalling children,

the hard-bitten matrons of the Buildings; Mrs. Dakers, at Chadshill, had none. For Harold, now in his last year and taking no chances with his final examination, had gone into diggings in Easy Row, opposite the Prince's Hospital, and Jonathan, in spite of the added expense, had approved his plan.

Time after time, when he had visited Chadshill, he had been overwhelmed by the gloom of that lonely little house, in which his mother continued to dream of Eugene Dakers like a sad priestess, the last of her line, celebrating, among temple ruins, the offices of a cult that would die with her; for by this time even the tea-tables of Halesby had grown weary of Mr. Dakers' memory. Time after time, by force of persuasions and endearments, Jonathan had tried to make her abandon Chadshill and join forces with him in Wednesford, not only because he saw the day when Harold would leave her approaching, but also because the atmosphere of the Hammonds' house was getting on his nerves.

Though he was able and wise enough to make allowances for the old man's moods, which alternated now between garrulous boastfulness and periods of depressed and silent suspicion, he couldn't afford to face the peculiar atmosphere which was arising between himself and Rachel. His pity for her and her complete dependance on him, not only as the responsible member of the partnership but as her sole companion and confidant, had lately betrayed him into a number



of intimate and emotional situations resembling that by which he had been faced at the time when she had given him her sympathy in the case of the Rudge disaster. On that occasion, by providence, he had escaped. On another, moved by pity and admiration, he might easily be less fortunate. He was not in love with her; he was still in love with Edie. It was ridiculous to imagine that Rachel was in love with him; and yet...and yet, in that complete and segregated proximity, he could never be quite confident that the obvious might not happen.

It was, in fact, the way of least resistance, and his loyalty to the idea of Edie, who didn't, probably, care a damn for him, compelled him with all his strength to resist taking it. Without wounding Rachel: that was what made the situation so delicate. He shuddered to see himself settling down (as they put it) in Wednesford; a shabby, humble, middle-aged general practitioner, moderately corpulent and bald, with a competent wife and a regulated family of children speaking in a Black Country accent; utterly respectable and utterly undistinguished. As a sequel to this picture he imagined this domestic scene being visited, in after years, by Edie—an Edie, perversely, it may be admitted, not subject to change—the eternal Edie of his Silver Street memories. He imagined the pity, the regret for what might have been (even though it could never have been) in Edie's eyes, and felt sorrier for himself than Edie could ever have felt for anyone.

This was the dream, he admitted, of a romantic, an incurable sentimentalist. Alas, he was both!

And Mrs. Dakers, in point of fact, refused, under any circumstances to leave Chadshill. She was as much the slave of that house and a physical part of its structure as was Ada of Higgins's Buildings, and Jonathan of old Hammond's surgery.

## CHAPTER VIII

### EXPERIMENTUM FIT

In the following Spring Edie wrote to him from Germany. She had taken her Swedish diploma and now, with a new enthusiasm for remedial gymnastics, had established herself, for the sake of extended experience, in a hospital, the *Evangelisches Krankenhaus* at Elberfeld, near Düsseldorf in the Rhineland. Her letter brought to Jonathan, besides its usual thrill, an unusual delight. She was full of a new and passionate interest in the medical aspects of her work.

*"I only wish," she wrote, "that all this had happened four years ago; we should have had so much in common to talk about. I must have been stupid not to realize how fascinating everything medical was. Why didn't you ever tell me, Jonathan? When I have learnt as much as my poor brain can, I think I shall come back to England—perhaps to North Bromwich—and practise massage; then we shall be able to go on our walks over the hills again, and compare notes. What fun it will be, Jonathan dear! We have another thing in common now by the way. This place, I'm positive, must be exactly like Wednesford, though even the Black Country in Germany is terribly tidy. The only interesting creatures in Elberfeld must be the calculat-*

*ing horses, whom I haven't met. However, à bientôt—really à bientôt!*" The letter contained hints as to a brief but adventurous love-affair in Sweden; and that was why Jonathan was thankful to hear she was in Germany, even in a German Wednesford.

Harold, meanwhile, was entering on his last lap. He was anxious for his own sake as well as for Jonathan's to take a brilliant degree, and looked like doing so. He lived in the wards, and in his stuffy diggings, unmoved by the seductive theatrical ladies who occupied the rest of the lodging-house. Jonathan saw him rarely; and, when they met, they rarely spoke of the partnership which, previously, had been taken for granted. The whole tone of Harold's conversation was alien to Jonathan in those days. In it there were references to a kind of life which, in Jonathan's time, had not existed; a life of night-clubs and jazz-bands and negro dance-tunes which gave him the impression, reinforced by the veiled allusions in Edie's letters, that the *fin-de-siècle* civilisation from which his retirement to Wednesford isolated him was swiftly and steadily going mad. Edie and Harold were very little younger than himself, yet the spirit of the world in which they were living appeared to be separated from his own by centuries. He saw himself as definitely, incurably provincial; a back number. This new Merrie England seemed to him a melancholy affair. He was forced to the conclusion that he was growing old.

That Spring, among the multitudinous energies which its coming released, gave new life to the spores of pathogenic organisms which the winter had frozen into inactivity. Jonathan was set to fight successive waves of zymotic disease; measles, and German measles, and scarlatina. Then, waking with the primroses on Uffdown, diphtheria reappeared. It flowered first, like those same primroses, in a sheltered spot; the cottages that flanked the foundry in the pit of the Stour valley. Thence, with the sure instinct of a returning migrant, it climbed the slope and settled in its old nesting-place, the mass of Higgins's Buildings.

"I can't help thinking," Rachel said, "of Ada's baby."

"I've already tried to put the fear of God into Ada," Jonathan told her.

Apparently the fear of God was not, in this case, the beginning of wisdom. What with the labour of a year's housekeeping and the imminent prospect of the second baby, Ada had now become completely Higginsized and expected Providence to help her, without helping herself. In the middle of the night, which was the hour at which messages from that quarter usually arrived, the familiar jangle of the night-bell summoned Jonathan to Higgins's Buildings.

"It's our Ada's Rachel, doctor," they told him. "Summat's ketched her in the throat."

"Ketched her in the throat! Damned fool!" Jonathan murmured sleepily as he put two sterile swabs

and a phial of antitoxin into his bag. "Summat's ketched her in her little throat, doctor," they all repeated—for every case of illness in the Buildings attracted an interested crowd of spectators at any time of the day or night. Jonathan cleared the room furiously; its air was thick with exhalations all too human. He scolded Ada. "Didn't I tell you not to let the Tyldesley children come near her? Didn't I explain to you that they were contacts? If the child's been infected it's your own fault."

But Ada, pale and worn and monstrous with her pregnancy, was past scolding.

"Oh, doctor, dae' say that!" she wailed. "It come sudden-like, of itself. Her was all right this morning." Jonathan patted her shoulder. "Sit down over there while I look at her, that's a good girl."

Her husband, whose calloused hands sparkled with brass filings like a dusky auriferous conglomerate, tremblingly pulled back the sheet and disclosed the sick child. The baby's fair hair, darkened by sweat, clung to the flushed and blue-veined forehead in rat's tails. By the gleam of an electrically-lighted spatula Jonathan examined her throat as thoroughly as her screams and struggles would permit. A dew of perspiration stood out on Joe's grimy forehead. Ada, obediently seated, writhed and gasped, as though the child were still part of her and its pain and crying traversed her own sad body. As far as Jonathan could see, and vision was almost impossible, there was as yet

no membrane; but the tonsils were angrily swollen and streaked with mucus. He took a couple of swabs for culture and diagnosis; and then proceeded to erect his sterilizer and boil his syringe for an injection of antitoxin. The child had relapsed into a wheezy half-consciousness; but her parents surveyed Jonathan's preparations with alarm.

"Oh, doctor, yo'm not a'going to cut her?" Ada pleaded.

"Don't worry yourself, Ada. I'm only going to give her a dose of antitoxin."

"It bain't the diptheria?" the husband whispered hoarsely. "Tell us it bain't that!"

"I can't tell you what it is yet, Joe; but I'm taking no chances."

"Yo'm not going to stick that great needle in her?" Ada screamed. "Oh doctor, I shall faint, I know I shall."

But it was Joe who fainted. He went down, all the five-foot-ten of him, like a log, and Jonathan, alone in the ill-lighted room with the unconscious man, the hysterical woman and the half-conscious child, was forced to abandon his injection until Joe came round again. Then he performed it, as carefully and swiftly as he could, and left the unhappy parents with encouragements, and instructions which, he knew, they were far too dazed to fulfil. Not that it mattered, he told himself, as he tramped homeward through the dark, desolate High Street. He had taken the most efficient

precaution known to humanity; he had done his best, whether the swabs that he would send next morning to Stafford revealed the fine cylinders of the Klebs-Löffler bacillus or no.

Next day, as a matter of fact, the clinical picture was more cheerful. The child still tossed or dozed in a low fever, the pulse, though feeble, was slower; and though neither pulse nor temperature reflects the gravity of that disease, it looked as though a simple tonsillar infection might easily explain the symptoms. Still, pending the confirmation of the Stafford laboratory, he was doubtful; and when Rachel suggested visiting the Buildings he dissuaded her.

"But surely there's not much risk of infection," she asked him, "as long as I'm careful?"

"Small risk of diphtheria," he told her; "but that cursed place is so saturated with bacteria of all kinds that you're better away from it. If you don't get diphtheria, there's no knowing what other infection you might pick up. It's stiff with influenza anyway."

The day's work was vexatious from beginning to end. Every second child he saw had some throat affection or other. As a matter of routine he felt it his duty to give them all precautionary doses of antitoxin and take swabs to send to Stafford; and Wheeler, whose drugged mind was incapable of reacting quickly to any emergency, had run out of the serum which he was supposed to keep in stock. Jonathan rang up Craig to report this lapse; quite uselessly, for Craig did not dare to quarrel



with Wheeler. Jonathan, fortunately, was bound by no such obligations. It did him good in his present state of overworked irritation to blow off steam and tell the chemist exactly what he thought of his negligence.

"I'm prepared to bet that you don't run out of morphine," he said.

"What's that? What's that?" cried Wheeler. "I'll trouble you to repeat that before witnesses, Dr. Dakers. That's actionable, that is! You say I take morphine?"

Jonathan laughed. He had said nothing of the sort. All that he wanted was a dozen ampoules of diphtheria antitoxin. When did Wheeler expect them? That afternoon, by the four o'clock train, Wheeler assured him. The druggist was somewhat sobered by the fact that he had given himself away. It wasn't his fault, he said, in any case. He had wired to Stafford. As soon as the serum arrived . . .

"I'll call here myself at half past four," said Jonathan.

But at half past four the serum had not arrived. Probably, if the truth were known, Wheeler hadn't wired for it; these morphine takers lied quite automatically. Flushed and fortified by the drug, he was now ready to argue and explain the situation at length. But Jonathan, by now, was in no mood for explanation or argument. Consigning Wheeler to the devil, he jumped into his car and drove right off to Edmondson's in North Bromwich to get a supply of serum for himself.

That evening he could make no speed; the roads were sodden; his worn tyres skidded from one rut to another; the mild air that had enveloped the Black Country that morning was suddenly permeated by a cold current from the North that turned its suspended moisture into a fog that his feeble headlights could not penetrate. As he approached North Bromwich the fog and the traffic thickened. High-decked tramcars came swinging out of the murk with clanging bells. Over the greasy wood-pavement Jonathan crawled in at a walking pace, and when, at last, he had bought his serum, he knew that the worst of the journey was still before him.

In the middle of the scarred waste to west of the Sedgebury ridge, where no light shone but the bleared sparkle of a neighbouring spoil-heap, his off rear wheel punctured. For twenty minutes he had to struggle with jack and levers mending it. It took him an hour and a half to cover the ten miles from North Bromwich to Wednesford. When, finally, grimy and triumphant, he crossed the bridge at the bottom of the Stour valley and changed into bottom gear to climb the hill, it was nine o'clock. He supposed that old Hammond would have dealt with the evening surgery. Now Rachel, with supper waiting, would be wondering what had happened to him. Well, well, it was all over now, he thought, as the car, with loud protests, crossed the brow of the hill.

He slowed down for a moment, wondering if it

wouldn't be worth while stopping to have a last look for the night at Ada's child. As he hesitated a figure loomed out of the fog and clutched at the side of the car. A hoarse voice summoned him, breathlessly.

"Is that you, doctor? Thank God yo've come at last. Her's going, doctor! Her's going!"

It was Joe, Ada's husband. Jonathan pulled up sharply. Half dazed with fatigue he tumbled out of the car.

"What do you mean, Joe? What's wrong?"

"Her's going, doctor!" The hoarse voice broke into tears. "And Ada's come on bad."

Once more Jonathan pushed his way through the crowd of spectators; the hunched figures of shawled women clustered like vultures round the child's bed. They stared and whispered, too intent to make way for him. On the other side of the room, crouched on a mattress, Ada lay whimpering in the first stages of labour. She threw a dazed and piteous glance at Jonathan. "Oh, doctor!" she wailed. "Oh, doctor! Oh, my dear Lord!" With a sudden gasp she clutched the skinny arm of the woman who acted as midwife. "Hold on, that's right, that's the way!" the midwife grunted in sympathy.

An aged crone who was kneeling at the bedside impeded Jonathan.

"Yo'm too late, doctor. Her's as good as gone," she croaked with macabre satisfaction, as she clung to his arm and straightened her rheumatic hips. "I've seed

'em go like this before. It's the croup; that's what it is," she informed him.

"Bring a light quickly," said Jonathan, "and give us some air. Clear them all out of this, Joe," he ordered abruptly.

Air . . . There was none in the room; but the child was dying for it. The muscles of the chest, the nostrils, the neck were all fighting together in that supreme, that desperate struggle. In vain; for the face which had been flushed that morning was already blue and livid. No need now to wait on Stafford for a diagnosis. Nothing but a diphthericmembrane could have clogged the larynx like this, starving the avid lungs of the air that was life. The old woman was right. Now it was a matter of moments. One chance—a thin chance—and one only.

"Run down to the car, Joe . . . Quick . . . And bring my bag."

He looked at his grimy hands. "Get me some water. Any water will do." The midwife's hands trembled; the water was spilt on the floor. Jonathan washed his hands quickly. Joe, panting, returned. Ada cried out once more "Look after her, Joe," Jonathan said. "I don't want you to faint again. Mrs. Morris'll help me. Hold the light here, Mrs. Morris. I want to look in my bag."

It was crammed full of the boxes of antitoxin he had bought in North Bromwich. He bundled them out. "Leave them where they are, woman!" he swore at

Mrs. Morris, who stooped to retrieve them. "The light! The light!"

Yes, there it was, thank heaven! A doubtful scalpel. And a number-twelve rubber catheter. Anything would do. He sliced the rubber tube in half and approached the bed. No time for sterilisation. Lister be damned!

"Hold the light *up*, Mrs. Morris. I must have light. Look the other way if you're nervous. Keep it steady for God's sake."

He knelt by the bedside, bending over the child, the dubious scalpel poised like a pen in his fingers. Tracheotomy without chloroform! This was vivisection with a vengeance!

"Keep that light steady. Over here! You're throwing a shadow," he growled.

"Oh, Joe, Joe, I can't abear it. It's killing me!" Ada was wailing.

The fingers of Jonathan's left hand were on the small white throat, stretching the skin away from the middle line; beneath it he could feel the cartilaginous rings of the trachea. The scalpel blade pressed downward, drawing a line that gaped, oozing black blood. Jonathan could see no more; but now the rings of the wind-pipe were rough beneath his finger. How tiny it was—no wider than the stem of his fountain pen! Again, with infinite care, the blade pressed downward. The cartilage divided, he was through. Immediately a new sound thrilled the silence; a sucking, hoarse, bubbling sound, as the labouring lungs pumped air and frothed

blood through the wound he had made. A frightening sound; ghastly, inhuman. Ada heard it.

"What's he a'doing of, Joe? Oh, Joe, they'm killing her! Oh, Joe . . . Joe! Let us see her!" She struggled wildly.

"Not yet. Keep her quiet," said Jonathan. "Curse this light!"

At that moment all the arcs in Christendom couldn't have helped him. It was only by feeling, through the sputter of air and blood, that he finally succeeded in inserting the cut catheter tube into the narrow lumen of the child's trachea. When he had done so, at last, that terrible sound of breathing ceased; the air began to pass with a soft, sighing whistle into the pumping lungs. Within a few moments the respiration became slower and less desperately violent; the livid hue of cyanosis disappeared from the child's face. The danger of imminent suffocation, at least, was over.

"You can do what you like with the light now, Mrs. Morris," he said softly. "I'm afraid I frightened you. Did I? Well, well, I'm sorry. It's all over."

He rose to his feet and stretched himself, dazed, exhausted. The quietness of his voice, his sober words belied the exultation that thrilled him, transcending any emotion he had ever known. It was over. Unaided, armed inadequately, defying every tradition of aseptic surgery, guided by nothing but his sense of touch, he had achieved the crowning justification of all his years of study in North Bromwich. Here, defi-

nately, undeniably, in this squalid room, he had wrestled with death at its most malignant. Here, by the grace of God and the splendour of science he had fought and conquered. The conflict left him overwhelmed with pride and humility; shattered, elated, inclined to weak laughter like a man who has taken gas. He stood and gazed at his triumph, incapable, for the moment, of action.

But other action, as his reason soon told him, was needed. His operation was a temporary measure at best. He had not even fixed the tube in place. Now that he had time to think he proceeded deliberately, catching the rubber to the skin with a catgut suture.

The child started at the prick of the needle. Fortunately, for Ada's ears, robbed of her larynx she could not cry. That she should start was a good sign in itself. Previously, beneath the scalpel's incision, she had lain as limp and mute as a lamb between the shearers' knees.

The tube was fixed. What next? Jonathan thought swiftly. This was the point at which expert nursing became necessary. At the best of times he could not have left the child in this abominable room; much less when Ada, who might have insisted on tending her, was lying in the throes of labour. He made his mind up quickly.

"Joe, you'd better come with me. I may want you. Mrs. Morris will stay with Ada."

It was better, he thought, for Ada's sake, not to explain any more than that the child was safe.

"There's no need for you to worry about her now," he told her. "You're not going to lose her this time; you can take my word for it. You've only yourself to think of now; so cheer up, my dear. Mrs. Morris'll see to you, and it'll soon be over."

He signalled to Joe, who picked up the child in a blanket. Under the cover of Mrs. Morris's broad back they left the room. Still strangely elated, he turned the car in the narrow road, and set off through the fog, with Joe and the baby toward the Hospital. He hardly expected to be welcomed there; but this time Jonathan was having no nonsense. Some hint of hardness in his haggard face must have shown this, since the matron, for once, was soft as butter. They put Ada's child into the single-bedded private ward which Craig used for his better middle-class patients. If the matron had told him that it was engaged in advance, Jonathan would have persisted; and she knew it.

"There's nothing more to be done for the present," he told her, as he wrote down his instructions on the diet-sheet. "I want an hourly record of the pulse. That's important. Report at once to me if there's any change. See that the tube is kept clear; don't forget that is all she has to breathe through. And . . . No, I think that's all."

He handed her back the board to which the case-sheet and temperature chart were attached; she scrutinized it to see that everything was in order.



"You haven't put down the disease, Dr. Dakers," she said.

"Haven't I? Well, I can't be exact for the moment. Just put down Tracheotomy. That will do. I'll be round again to-morrow morning at ten and put in a silver tube perhaps. We'll see. Good-night, matron."

Outside, in the fog, he began to feel very weary; so many and such various activities had been crowded into the last ten hours; apart from a hurried snack at mid-day he had eaten nothing since breakfast. But now that the child was in safe hands, Ada had to be dealt with. For the sixth time that day he crossed the Stour and pulled up on the hill's brow opposite Higgins's Buildings. The usual vulturine congregation told him that the baby had been born. A boy. "Her's had a lovely time," they said. Lovely? Well, everything in life was relative.

"I was thinking, doctor," said Mrs. Morris, "of getting her back on to the bed."

He stopped her just in time. It was useless to explain to people like Mrs. Morris that putting a new-born child and a puerperal mother into sheets that were probably infected with diphtheria was not to be recommended. Ada, who had surrendered her body limply to the divine relaxation which follows that transcendent physical exertion, recognized him with a wan, a strangely beautiful smile. It was of a beauty that only doctors and lovers see.

"I dae' even know what you was doing with her,

doctor," she whispered, "but thank God you done it! Poor mossel, too! Her won't hauf be set up when her sees her baby brother. It's all right, doctor, bain't it? Naught to be afeared on now?"

"You needn't even think of her. She's best where she is. Even if she were here you couldn't look after her."

"That's true enough," Ada admitted. "Still, when they're your own . . ."

Mrs. Morris brought him a cup of tea, a dense decoction sweetened with tinned milk, resembling a hundred others which he had drunk at midnight in mean rooms amid the odours of parturition. He gulped it down gratefully; it put new heart into him as he drove home, locked up his car in the garage, and entered the silent house.

A carefully laid cold supper awaited him on the living-room table; the room was warm but cheerless in the white gaslight, for the fire had gone out. He sat down to eat with a sigh, pouring himself an unusual allowance of the doctor's whisky. Ah, that was not so bad! The clock struck one. He ate greedily but without knowing that he was eating; his mind continued to retrace the events of the day, over and over again. A soft rustle recalled him from the middle of his quarrel with Wheeler. He looked up suddenly to find himself face to face with Rachel.

"I thought I heard you," she said. "Do tell me what happened. We were getting quite anxious."

She was dressed in a blue kimono with a Japanese design of cranes and irises, wrapped closely about her figure, her dark hair drawn back from her brow in two thick plaits reached nearly to her waist. In this unusual guise she looked smaller, childlike, appealing. Her braided hair gave her the aspect of a girl of sixteen.

"I'm sorry if I woke you," he said. "That's a dreadful shame."

"You didn't. I've been listening for you. Do tell me what happened."

His mind was so crowded that it was a relief to speak. He spoke in short sentences, in the intervals of eating, recounting the day's exciting events from beginning to end; his fury with Wheeler, the foggy drive into North Bromwich; the puncture; the crowning emergency of the tracheotomy; Ada's new baby.

She listened solemnly, sitting with the width of the table between them, her chin propped on her hands. Her eyes brightened, her cheeks flushed and paled again as she heard his story, solemnly thrilled by it like an eager child. And Jonathan, excited by his achievement, yet, in retrospect, amused by it, excelled himself. He was conscious of his own vividness and of the emotional sympathy that his narrative aroused in her. He glowed, he was exalted; for the first time in life he felt himself great. Her eyes took fire from his ardour; they glowed together. Then, suddenly, her face dropped; her hands went up to her eyes. It took him a moment to realize that she was crying.

"Rachel, my dear, what's the matter?" he stammered. She only shook her head. She couldn't explain. Was he so clumsy, so dense, so insensitive that he couldn't realize the differences in the meaning of tears? Could he, who saw so much of women, understand them as little as this? The answer, if he could have guessed it, was simple enough. It was the first time in Jonathan's life that he had been alone with a weeping woman. The sound, the spectacle embarrassed and stirred him beyond words. He could do nothing but leave his place and stand above her, harrowed and impotent.

"Rachel . . . What's the matter?" he repeated. "What can I do?"

For answer she raised a smiling, tear-stained face. "Oh, Jonathan!"—it was the first time she had ever spoken his name; her voice was low and broken, and infinitely appealing—"Oh, Jonathan, can't you see that I'm proud of you?"

She stretched out her hand to him; the wrist was firm and soft. Forgetting, for a moment, her unconventional attire, she had allowed the kimono to slip away from her, revealing a cambric nightdress and a white shoulder that held Jonathan's eyes. In his day's work he could see a dozen revelations of this kind utterly unmoved; but this, in its warm, emotional softness, its yielding, impassioned, unguarded intimacy, awakened another fire. His fingers were conscious of that sleek, silken whiteness. Unbidden they advanced and tight-

ened, clasping it. She was all young and little and weak beneath his strong hands.

"Rachel," he whispered, "Rachel . . . "

There must have been something in the tone of his voice that recalled her enraptured mind to her own lapse in modesty. Hurriedly, freeing her arm from his fingers, she contrived to wrap the kimono about her again and moved away from him with a decision that left no doubt as to her intention.

"I'm sorry," she murmured. "I can't think why I behaved so stupidly. I got quite lost in what you were telling me. I was carried away by it; it all sounded so splendid." She smiled. "I suppose it hadn't struck *you* that there was something heroic about it?"

"There wasn't, you know," Jonathan admitted.

"How like you! Oh dear, dear!" she dried her tears and laughed softly. Now she was infinitely more composed than Jonathan; had passed in an instant from the secret stranger, whose unfamiliar loveliness had set him on fire, to the familiar, sombre Rachel whom he knew. His head swam with an uneasy sense of frustration. Something, somebody, had cheated him. She went on speaking, soberly:

"It was when I thought of poor Ada—you made me see the whole thing, that awful room, the old woman holding the light—it 'all came over me' as they say. I suppose I was tired out. We've had a bad evening too. But I won't disturb you any more,"—she retreated skilfully—"I only wanted to make sure that

everything was all right. Good-night, Dr. Dakers. You ought to sleep well. I'm sure you deserve to."

She was gone, like a ghost; so quietly that he couldn't even hear her on the stairs. Jonathan returned thoughtfully to his abandoned supper. It was no use; his appetite had vanished. In the reaction that followed him into his new solitude, the last event of this surprising day obliterated all others. Climbing the stairs, a few moments later, he felt a little light-headed. An hour ago he had been more sure of himself than ever. Now, as he slowly undressed and stretched his tired limbs, he was conscious of a sense of uncertainty and insecurity such as he had never known before.

## CHAPTER IX

### CROWNING MERCY

To every exaltation such as this there succeeds an inevitable reaction. Not only does the pendulum swing to its natural limit, but that power by whose censorship the extravagances of human pride are regulated, has a habit of exaggerating its swing with a corrective impulse. For the moment it seemed as though Jonathan's exploit were benignantly regarded by the powers of light. Flattered and delighted by the result of his operation—for the tracheotomy case showed every sign of making a swift recovery—it did not occur to him that the verdict of celestial justice was still suspended.

It was true that the Hospital matron seemed more than usually forbidding, that the nurses eyed him curiously as he entered the lobby, now permeated by a strong odour of carbolic which emanated from the soaked sheet that had been suspended before the door of the private ward. But these signs did not disturb him; even after three years of regular attendance at the Hospital he knew that his visits were still regarded as intrusions. What he did not know was that, in the blind moment of triumph, he had allowed himself to play directly into Craig's hand, and given his rival the

exact opportunity for which he had been waiting. The rope, so obligingly paid out to him, was now about his neck, a noble, perhaps, but a distinctly sinister ornament.

As soon as Craig reached the Hospital on the morning after the operation, the matron, who treated him as a father-confessor with respect to all sins—particularly those of Jonathan and Lucas—revealed the enormous happenings of that night. Craig listened with the light of an executioner of the Holy Office in his yellowish eyes; his blunt, white fingers rubbed his big jowl thoughtfully; his thick lips bared the teeth in an ugly smile.

"H'm. Is that so? In the private ward, you say?"

"We couldn't have put her in the surgical ward." The matron defended herself anxiously.

"Of course you couldn't... Did he want to?" he added quickly.

"Oh, no. As a matter of fact he gave me no choice."

"H'm. How did he describe the case on the case-sheet?"

"At first he wrote nothing. I called his attention to that, of course. Then he put down *Tracheotomy*."

"Tracheotomy's not a disease. That was clever of him. Of course it's Diphtheria. How is the child, by the way?"

"She seems to be doing quite well," said the matron, regretfully.

"H'm." Craig also sounded regretful. "I'll see



about it. I think, for the moment," he went on, "it's better that the general public shouldn't know that we've an infectious case in the Hospital. The nurses who have dealt with it are isolated, I hope? Remember that none of them must go near the general wards."

"But, doctor," the matron protested, "Sister Jones and Nurse Hollis and I assisted, all three of us." She became panicky. "The wards are full—there's three operation cases of yours and one that Dr. Monaghan did for Dr. Lucas. I can't possibly leave them all to one probationer."

"Of course you can't," Craig agreed, "but the others are contacts. As Medical Officer of Health I can't allow them to come into touch with uninfected persons. That is a matter of plain duty. And, of course, as a private practitioner and a member of the Hospital Staff I can't allow my own patients to be neglected. Dr. Dakers has put us all in an awkward dilemma. I must see the Secretary about it at once."

"In the meantime," the matron persisted, "what about our surgical cases? Who's to do the dressings?"

Craig hated doing any routine work for which he wasn't being handsomely paid. "For the moment," he said; "I'm afraid I shall have to strain a point. You," he conceded, "can look after them yourself. It will be understood, of course, that you don't go near the infectious patient. Sister Jones and Nurse Hollis are in quarantine. They'll have to take their meals separately."

"But, doctor, you *know* we're short of servants . . ."

"Of course I do. But don't blame *me*, Miss Jessell."

Smiling with grim satisfaction Craig drove back to his "office" and broke the good news to Monaghan.

"You've got 'um on toast this time; you've caught 'um by the short hairs!" cried Monaghan gleefully.

Craig lit a cigarette. "Just look through that file of infectious notifications. See if you can find one from Dakers. Diphtheria." He looked at his notes. "Name, Rachel Matthews; address, Higgins's Buildings."

"Divil a one," said Monaghan.

Craig lifted the telephone receiver. "Wednesford two four, please," he asked with unusual politeness. "Hello! Is that Dr. Dakers? Dr. Craig speaking. . . . Oh, is that you Miss Hammond? I want to speak to Dr. Dakers, just for one moment . . . Are you there, Dakers? Yes. Craig. What about that case of diphtheria of yours in the Hospital? I haven't as yet had any notification of it. Oh . . . When did you first see the case? What? Two days ago? The fact that you've sent swabs to Stafford makes no difference. The law is explicit . . . No, no; that won't do at all! If you've sent swabs you must have suspected diphtheria. Did you give antitoxin? . . . If you gave antitoxin that makes it certain you suspected. Honestly, Dakers, you have absolutely no excuse for not notifying the case. There's far too much slackness of this kind in the district already. The County Medical

Officer feels strongly on the point. I don't want to seem unfriendly, Dakers, but I must do my duty. In any case, kindly send me the notification at once."

He rang off. "You didn't mention the Hospital," Monaghan remarked.

"Of course not. I'm waiting for his admission that it's diphtheria."

Ten minutes later the notification arrived. Craig folded the precious document and put it in his pocket. "You'd better take my visiting list this morning, Monaghan," he said. "I shall be busy."

"Busy" was not the word for it. First he saw Clarke, the Secretary of the Hospital Committee.

"Kindly look up Rule Five of the regulations," he said. "I think you'll find that the Hospital is not, under any circumstances, to be used for infections cases. Please correct me if I'm wrong."

"You're perfectly right," said Clarke, bewildered; "but what the devil . . ."

"Dakers forced the matron to admit a case of diphtheria last night!"

"The deuce he did! We shall have to get rid of it at once."

Craig shook his head. "You can't. There's nothing to be gained by that anyway. The mischief is done already and can't be undone. I'm telling you that as a private individual. Now I'm going to speak to you in my official capacity as Medical Officer of Health."

"All right, go ahead!" said Clarke. "What do you want me to do?"

"First of all you must close the Hospital. The place is infected. I shall put it in quarantine."

"You mean that no more patients can be admitted?"

"Admitted or discharged."

"What about emergency cases? Won't that be awkward?"

"Damned awkward for everybody. That's Dakers' fault, not mine."

"Very well." Clarke sighed. "If you order it, I suppose the Hospital must be closed. Anything else?"

"That's only the beginning. Next you must wire to North Bromwich and get in two more nurses."

"Two extra nurses? For one case of diphtheria? Whatever do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Two members of the staff are already in quarantine by my orders. I have to treat them as 'contacts.' That means that we've only one probationer left to deal with the cases already in the wards; and that, of course, is impossible."

"How long will the nurses' quarantine last?" Clarke enquired nervously.

"Probably about a month. Twelve days from their last contact with infection."

"How much will these extra nurses cost?"

"Call it five guineas a week each. Ten for the two of them."

"And four weeks? My dear Craig, that means forty guineas!"

"Correct. I'll give you a prize for mental arithmetic," said Craig with a sardonic smile.

"Forty guineas . . . Forty-two pounds!" Clarke repeated. "But this is no joke."

"I never suggested that it was. I quite agree."

"But, my dear sir, our account's already overdrawn. The committee can't possibly sanction an expenditure of that kind. Who's going to pay for it?"

"Ask me another!" said Craig with an ugly laugh. "I'm not."

"If there were any chance of the patient meeting the expense," Clarke began . . .

"There isn't. Not an earthly. It's a child from Higgins's Buildings."

Clarke shook his head. "We simply can't do it, Craig."

"You've got to do it."

"I shall have to summon an emergency meeting of the committee."

"Naturally. The sooner the better. This afternoon at the latest. Let me know the time. I shall have something to tell them."

Craig had something to tell each of them in private, before the meeting. His official position gave him the whip-hand, and he knew it. By the middle of the afternoon all Wednesford was buzzing with two conflicting stories; Craig's own account of Jonathan's de-

liberate enormity, a deep-laid scheme, prompted by jealousy, designed to bring ruin on the town's sole, struggling charitable institution; and another, emanating from the discreditable denizens of Higgins's Buildings, in which Jonathan figured more heroically than he had ever imagined himself as a surgical genius and the protector of the poor.

By evening, when the scandalized committee had listened to Craig's report, both stories had become enlarged and exaggerated. Jonathan was not only the Hospital's evil angel; he was a public danger. Through sheer incompetence, if not out of criminal carelessness, he had failed to diagnose a straightforward case of diphtheria which Mrs. Perry was certain she could have recognised at sight. By neglecting to notify it, he had laid the whole town open to infection. Having failed in his diagnosis he had proceeded, with unexampled frivolity, to leave his patient and go dashing off to North Bromwich in his motor-car on some errand of pleasure at whose nature it would be indecent even to hint. Returning later from his debauches he had found his unhappy victim *in extremis* and undertaken an unnecessary operation which he was entirely unqualified to perform. At this point, frightened by what he had done, he had conceived the diabolical plan of throwing the burden of his failure on poor Miss Jessell's nursing, hoping that the child, by dying inside it (like that poor creature with appendicitis, whom he had killed three years ago) would throw discredit on the Hospital. The

child was already moribund and could not possibly live till morning. All Dr. Craig's patients in the Hospital were certain to be infected with the disease, and two of the nurses were already sickening for it. In the meantime the unfortunate Hospital Committee were faced with an expenditure of several hundred pounds, and the institution would certainly go bankrupt. For at least three months no patients could be admitted to it; which meant that "our poor people," deprived of Dr. Craig's surgical skill, must inevitably die like flies. That horrible old drunkard Hammond had been bad enough in all conscience; but Jonathan's little finger was thicker than old Hammond's loins. Probably old Hammond was at the bottom of the whole conspiracy. Everybody knew that Jonathan slept with his daughter; that he owed money everywhere, and was being dunned for the car, which he had bought on the hire-purchase system. This was the moment, in short, for all Craig's friends and patients to rally to his side, and finally drive the liberal, free-thinking adventurer from the clean heart of Wednesford.

The reverse of this circulating coin of rumour was no less fantastic. There was not, there never had been any diphtheria in Wednesford. The disease, like appendicitis, was an invention of Craig's, who, as Medical Officer of Health, was paid half a guinea for every case notified out of the money which the working-classes were forced to pay in the form of rates. The oldest woman in Higgins's Buildings naturally knew all about

diphtheria; and Ada's baby was suffering from the croup. The operation had become necessary not because of the disease, but because of the stuff which Jonathan had been compelled to inject into her by Craig's orders. Craig got a commission on the supply of that as well. As for the operation itself; Jonathan had performed it simply and dexterously with Joe's pocket knife. He had removed the child's windpipe, sucked the poison out of it, and put it back again, as was always done (the old women affirmed) in bad cases of the croup. After that, quite rightly he had taken her to the Hospital. Not that Higgins's Buildings approved of hospitals. On the contrary. He had simply taken her there to show the nobs in the Wolverbury Road that Joe Hingston, who, in spite of his other shortcomings, paid high wages, had intended the Hospital to be used by working-class people. This was the moment, in short, for all the down-trodden to rally round Jonathan and show the Rector, the Tories and the Wolverbury Road generally that Craig couldn't fatten on their miseries for ever.

Within twenty-four hours Ada Matthews' baby had become the principal stake in a hot political and social dispute. The football season was over, and Wednesford, deprived of any other competitive diversion, and accordingly bored to death, acclaimed the Hospital case as a novel form of dog-fight. To one side Jonathan's name was a banner; to the other anathema. He became, with equal unwillingness, the hero and the villain of a



public melodrama composed, by both sides, without any reference to fact.

From either point of view the limelight was embarrassing, illuminating aspects of his position that were false. Under pressure of work he had committed an undeniable breach of the law by failing to notify the case as one of infectious disease. As a technical defence he could maintain that the diagnosis was in doubt, pending a bacteriological confirmation from Stafford. He had given the child antitoxin as a precaution and isolated it. The fact that he had done so strengthened rather than weakened his position. Unfortunately, on the telephone, Craig had caught him napping and forced him to admit that he regarded the case as one of diphtheria. On the other hand, among colleagues, a certain latitude in the time of notification had always been taken for granted. At the moment when Craig telephoned, the book of notification-forms had been open before Jonathan. If Stafford were reasonable he had no cause for anxiety there.

With regard to the Hospital, however, he stood his ground and was prepared to fight for it. The rules forbade the admission of infectious cases. Quite so; but this case was a matter of life and death, excusing the exception to which all rules were subject. Not only for the patient's sake but for Ada's and her baby's, he would not have been justified in leaving an infected child in that crowded room. It would have been equally barbarous to consign her to the care of any of the other

over-populated families in Higgins's Buildings. To have attempted to drive her, on that night, to the Infectious Hospital at Wolverbury would have been madness; more than madness—murder. He had acted deliberately. Under similar circumstances he would act in the same way again.

As for the Poor Hospital (as Mrs. Perry called it) the way in which Craig bullied and dragooned its committee was, to speak frankly, hysterical, if there were such a thing as deliberate hysteria. In the great general hospitals of North Bromwich, diphtheric tracheotomies were regarded as surgical emergencies. Of course they were isolated on admission, just as Ada's child had been isolated in the private ward. With due precautions the risk to the attendant nurses was infinitesimal, and to have put the whole of the hospital staff and patients in quarantine out of spite for Jonathan was a gross and ridiculous misuse of the power which Craig's official position gave him, as any medical man would readily admit.

But the members of the Hospital Committee were not medical men. Dependant on Craig's advice in all technical matters, to them his word was all the law and the prophets. Their position, in any case, was not a happy one. The Hospital was unpopular, and they knew it. Its funds were already overdrawn, and its founder, Joe Hingston, who never speculated in charity without being assured of a good return, had no intention of sinking another penny in a venture that had

already served its purpose. The work of the committee was arduous and thankless and ought not to be complicated by professional vendettas. Everything had gone smoothly until Jonathan's arrival; it was only his foolish competition with Craig that had turned the Hospital into a matter of contention. That, of itself was a reason for resentment, an irksome burden; and when the burden became not merely administrative but financial, when it imposed on them—who were already at their wits' ends—a sudden demand for forty or fifty pounds, surely it was time that the upstart should be put in his place!

They met unwillingly. Craig bullied and harangued them. Perry, whose gospel of peace at any price, learned at the end of Mrs. Perry's tongue, informed his policy in every other sphere, political, social, religious, implored Craig to relax his veto of quarantine, suggesting, quite reasonably, that he might be satisfied with a rigid isolation of the private ward. He appealed to Craig, as a friend, to admit some compromise. But Craig, this time, was out for his pound of flesh. His purpose, as they knew, was to humiliate Jonathan and, if possible, to destroy him. He was sorry—nobody could have been sorrier—that this discomfiture involved so much inconvenience to his friends: but duty was duty; the public health of Wednesford was in his hands; righteously, rigidly, even at the expense of friendship, he was bound to protect it.

"But this money," said Gaige, who saw his own

pocket suffering, "what are we going to do about that?"

"You'd better ask Dr. Dakers," Craig answered brutally.

"I move, gentlemen," George Higgins wheezed, "that Dakers be asked to meet us here and explain his conduct to the committee."

Wheeler, still smarting from the truths that Jonathan had presented to him, eagerly seconded the proposal; Gaige fumblingly supported it; and, since the only opposition came from John Morse, the Rector was saved from the awkwardness of giving a casting vote, and a letter, in the terms of the motion, was sent to Jonathan.

"Tell them to go to hell," growled old Hammond reading it. "The only authority that has a right to ask for explanations is the County Medical Officer, and if he's inquisitive you've got a good answer for him. Take him to Higgins's Buildings, and show him the sanitary conditions that Craig refused to condemn."

The advice was typical of the ungoverned impulses that had ruined old Hammond's career. He had been telling people to go to hell for fifty years. Judging by results, Jonathan had reason to distrust these methods. He turned for advice to Rachel. It was curious how deeply he relied upon her in all practical matters.

"I think you should go," she said at last. "If you don't go, they'll only hear Craig's side of it. Of course they'll accept that anyway; but if you refuse to meet them you'll put yourself more in the wrong."

Jonathan went to the meeting. It was held, not in the board-room of the infected Hospital, but in the magistrate's court-house, where the Rector occupied his usual position as Chairman of the bench, investing the whole proceedings with the atmosphere of a court of law. George Higgins, pallid and malignant, had come wheezing up from the foundry, greedy for Jonathan's blood. Wheeler sat by him, smiling and whispering. Gaige, bored and ponderous, twiddled his thumbs uneasily and stared at the clock. Clarke, in the happy impartiality of his secretarial function, continued to shuffle papers and minute-books. On Jonathan's entrance they all became solemn and judicial. The only smile that greeted him came from John Morse. Craig was not there. He wouldn't be, thought Jonathan.

Mr. Perry, his pince-nez slowly dangling from his fat fingers, acted as spokesman.

"We have sent for you Dr. Dakers," he said, "to ask for some explanation of this—this—er—unfortunate occurrence. The constitution of the Hospital, as laid down by its founder, forbids it being used for the treatment of infectious disease. Four days ago you took to the Hospital a case of diphtheria. May we ask—er—why?"

"Because I considered it a matter of life and death."

"You mean that this child would have died if you hadn't taken it there?"

"Yes, that's what I mean. More than that. If I hadn't moved the child from its surroundings—a baby

was born in the room the same night—two other lives at least would have been endangered. Three lives in all. Thanks to what I did then, as an instrument of Providence, those three lives are no longer in danger.”

“I’m glad, Dr. Dakers,” the Rector conceded, “that you put it that way. We are all of us glad to feel that the disaster has been providentially—er—limited.”

“Isn’t it a fact,” George Higgins rasped suddenly, “that any danger there may have been was doo to your own neglect and ignorance? Isn’t it a fact you mistook what was wrong with the child, and saved your own bacon and let us in for this by a dangerous operation? Isn’t that a fact? I say.”

Jonathan controlled himself with difficulty. “Whether it’s a fact or not,” he replied, “has nothing whatever to do with this committee.”

“Oh, *asn’t* it?” George Higgins wheezed. “Let me tell you this. . . .”

“One moment, Mr. Higgins,” the Rector smoothly intervened. “Admitted that the circumstances were not—er—ideal, was there any reason why you shouldn’t have applied to the Infectious Hospital at Wolverbury for this child’s admission in the ordinary way?”

“Every reason. She wouldn’t have stood the journey or the delay.”

“Couldn’t you have isolated her where she was?”

“Four people, including a woman in childbirth in a room eight feet square without through ventilation? No, sir.”

"Or put her with one of the neighbours?" Higgins added.

"She was possibly infectious. The place is swarming with unfortunate people living under conditions that a pig would have a right to resent. The fact that this child's life was in danger was primarily due to the appalling insanitary state and overcrowding of the property—your property, Mr. Higgins. As long as those Buildings remain standing and rotting there, with the drains opening into the cellars and the atmosphere like that of a sewer, they'll be a focus of infection and a danger to the whole town. I wasn't going to add to the risks that the tenants were running already."

"Ere, 'ere, 'old on!" wheezed Higgins, apoplectically. "Mr. Clarke, I'll ask you to kindly make a note of those words. That's slander, that is. If there's a law in England. . . ."

"Mr. Higgins, Mr. Higgins!" the Rector protested. "Do let us keep to the point."

"Let 'im take back what 'e's said!"

"You can have it in black and white, if you like," said Jonathan.

"D'you 'ear that, Clarke?"

The Secretary nodded nervously, "As Mr. Perry was saying, the point. . . ."

"I want to ask a question," said Wheeler, suddenly. "I want to know if Dr. Dakers gave this child anti-toxin?"

"That again is no business of yours, Mr. Wheeler.

The less you talk about antitoxin the better. I answer you for my own satisfaction, not yours. I did."

"Then you knew it was diphtheria," said Wheeler. "That's what I wanted to get at."

"I did not. The dose was prophylactic."

"Ere, chuck that Latin," growled Higgins.

"A precaution. I suspected it. Diphtheria, I mean."

"Well there you *are*!" the Rector cried triumphantly. "I need hardly ask if you were aware of the Hospital rules?"

"Perfectly aware."

"And yet, suspecting diphtheria, you took this child to the Hospital?"

"I did. What is more, Mr. Perry, I should do it again."

"If 'e knows the rules and goes against them, 'e ought to resign. That's what I say," said Higgins. Wheeler murmured: "Hear, hear."

"Let me explain a little further," Jonathan went on. "There isn't a single general hospital in England where tracheotomy isn't treated as a surgical emergency. You can make enquiries in North Bromwich and find out for yourselves. What I did, quite deliberately, was what any other conscientious doctor would have done. It's perfectly easy to isolate a case of that kind, as I did, in a private ward. There is no reason why it should interfere with the work of the Hospital in any way."

"But the Medical Officer of Health has put the Hospital in quarantine," said Perry.



"In my opinion quite unnecessarily."

"We have to abide by his instructions, none the less."

"If, as in this case, they're unreasonable, you can appeal to the County."

"Ere, 'ere, don't go attacking our doctor behind his back! That's not the game. If Dr. Craig had been 'ere. . . ." Higgins protested.

"He took damned good care not to be here," said Jonathan hotly.

"I'm sure," said Wheeler, "in any case we all have complete confidence in Dr. Craig."

"Yes, yes, we're all agreed on that," said Gaige, speaking for the first time. "The matter that troubles me most of all is that of money. It may be true that Dr. Dakers thought he was acting for the best; but the fact remains, it's us that have to pay the piper. Two special nurses at ten guineas a week, and us overdrawn as it is! Of course we're all very glad to feel that the child is safe. But fifty pounds! That's money!"

"Isn't a child's life worth fifty pounds, Mr. Gaige?" Jonathan was on his feet again, flushed and speaking rapidly. "You gentlemen appear to look upon this Hospital as a commercial concern. You think first of your blessed balance sheet, and then of your patients. You talk of your overdraft! Hasn't every hospital in the kingdom got an overdraft? Big ones, I can tell you. Because the managers are sufficiently conscious of their duty towards their neighbours to overdraw first and make up the deficit afterwards. Mr. Perry was talking

just now about the constitution—the rules of the Hospital. I've read it. I've got it here. It's called a charitable institution for the benefit of the poor of Wednesford. You've frightened the poor away from it and frozen them out of it. You've made it a nursing-home for the middle-classes. When I took that child there the other night I was acting in the spirit of the founder's intentions."

"Steady, Dr. Dakers! That's politics," said Gaige uneasily.

"Politics, Mr. Gaige? By God, sir, it's humanity!"

Jonathan sat down. The Rector, a little embarrassed by his profanity, quickly intervened.

"The fact remains, Dr. Dakers, that the rules have been broken, and that this committee has been saddled with an unjustifiable expense."

"The fact remains, sir," Jonathan answered, more quietly, "that a life has been saved and possibly three lives. You, Mr. Perry, are a minister of the gospel, a Christian. Probably I'm not. I put it to you in this way. If you were faced with an alternative of this kind—between the saving of a human life and the technical infringement of a rule . . . remember, life and death! . . . what would you do?"

For a moment Mr. Perry was nonplussed. He resented, and felt that he had a right to resent, any reference to his calling in connection with an affair of this kind. It was unfair. Far worse than that, it was in bad taste. Succeeding to the flush of momentary

embarrassment a look of childish obstinacy settled on his fleshy face.

"In such circumstances, Dr. Dakers," he replied. "I should—er—consult the committee."

"The committee? Who is the committee? What is the committee?" Jonathan laughed. "I tell you . . . a matter of moments . . . life and death! Do you realize what you are saying?"

The Rector nodded firmly, with assured stupidity.

"Then God help you!" said Jonathan. "For my part, I give it up!" He rose. "I don't think I need waste any more of your time."

Mr. Perry was too scandalized to answer; but Gaige, whose mind, though shocked, was still brooding on the overdraft, was heard to murmur something about fifty pounds. The sound of the words acted as a detonating spark to the gaseous mixture of fury and indignation in Jonathan's mind.

"Fifty pounds, Mr. Gaige? Can you think of nothing but your money? Kindly make a note, Mr. Clarke, I'll pay these expenses myself. I'll send down a cheque to your office within half an hour. Good day, gentlemen."

He swept out of the room like a tornado. His head was still spinning when he reached the street. Groups of women saluted him as he passed on his way to the surgery. He answered them with curious automatic gaiety. The blood that beat in his temples told him that he had fought and won a signal victory, trium-

phantly lifting the standard of an ideal above the hosts of the mean and material. It gave him another, a unique thrill, to write out the cheque which he had promised to Clarke, although he knew that it would play the devil with his balance. A great day, a day of magnificence! It seemed to him, at that moment, the happiest in his whole life.

On sober reflection he felt less sure of himself. Old Hammond, eagerly awaiting the story of what had happened, was obviously disappointed.

"You were a fool to go, in any case," he declared harshly; "and when you got there you should have held your tongue and left them to do the talking. It seems to me you've let them wipe the floor with you."

The offer of fifty pounds, which had seemed to Jonathan a magnificent if an expensive gesture, struck the old man as sheerly imbecilic; he could see Craig laughing at that pitiful climb-down, and all the rest of Wednesford laughing with Craig.

Beneath Hammond's scorn Jonathan's enthusiasm sputtered out like a damp squib. As usual, he went for consolation to Rachel.

"Do *you* think I've made such a utter fool of myself?"

"I think you were splendid," she said, "and so does John Morse."

"I've lost the game. I threw in my hand," he said.

"On the surface you've lost. But only on the surface. You've shown them, for the first time in their lives,

that money isn't everything. That's a new idea for Wednesford. It's worth everything else to have made that clear."

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it?"

"Something of that kind; for myself I feel that you've won. You mayn't be aware of it now; but time will show. At any rate there's one good thing about it. You've made your position clear. You can show your face at the Hospital without being ashamed. Nobody can say that you've tried to wreck it now. You've been strong, you've been generous. You've a right to take your own part without anyone suspecting your motives. If you'd won in father's way, you'd only be in for another fight. People may laugh at you at first; in the end they won't be able to help admiring you. . . . As I do," she added with sudden tears in her eyes.

"Rachel, you're a wonder," he cried. "You put new life into me. Whatever should I do without you?"

She retreated hastily. "No, no, don't say that," she said. "But in this business, I'm sure, I'm absolutely certain that I'm right."

Heartened by her and by the encouragement of John Morse, who, though he hadn't opened his lips at the meeting, was able to exercise in Wednesford a benignant influence, Jonathan continued to visit the Hospital as if nothing unusual had occurred. The story of his fifty pounds weighed heavily with Wednesford, where, as the saying went, it's money that talks. Ada's baby made a miracle of a recovery, and continued to advertise

Jonathan's skill and courage. Much as he hated it, the limelight continued to play on him. A sudden revulsion of popular feeling, stirred by the human aspect of the case, proclaimed him, temporarily, a romantic and even an heroic figure. Morse, in his quiet way, was hard at work. It astonished Jonathan to find himself surrounded by a general friendliness. Men and women whom he barely knew by sight saluted him in the street, and even stopped him to enquire how "that case in the Hospital" was going. He'd no idea that he had so many friends. It was all exciting, and a little disconcerting. As Rachel had suggested, the seeds of wider victory lay hidden in his defeat.

One day, on the eve of the Hospital's annual meeting, Morse came and planted himself like a block of granite in the surgery.

"I've been thinking," he said, "of what you told the committee the other day, about this Hospital having been founded for the benefit of the poor folk, and the charges frightening them off. The only people who've benefited by it so far as I can see, till you came along, are Craig and Monaghan. Now in North Bromwich, they tell me, the doctors give their services free."

"Not only in North Bromwich," Jonathan told him. "In London, Manchester, everywhere. You can make your own enquiries."

"I've done so. I'm on to this job. Just tell me one thing. Would you be willing to do the same in Wednesford?"

"Of course I would. I've never done anything else. The poor devils in our practice can't afford it."

"Then will you make a point of coming to the meeting to-morrow? I'll see that Lucas comes too."

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"I shall make a proposal," said Morse, mysteriously. "Reckon there'll be some fireworks. Guy Fawkes won't be in it!"

The annual meeting was crowded. Morse had seen to that. Craig sitting as usual at the elbow of Perry, the chairman, surveyed the mass of unfamiliar faces distrustfully. When Jonathan entered he gave a start; his thick lips hardened and he whispered to Monaghan. The Rector rose and called upon Clarke to read the annual report. A depressing document. In spite of Jonathan's donation (acknowledged without comment) the tail of the balance sheet showed a heavy overdraft; the Hospital had never been so deeply in debt.

Gaige, on the Rector's right, moved the adoption of the report. Nobody regretted the deplorable state of their finances more than he did. Yet nobody could say that the committee and the matron had not striven for economy; the fault must be placed on the shoulders of the people of Wednesford, who had failed to support an institution of which they ought to be proud. He could only call on them once again to give their help to what Mr. Perry had already and rightly called their beloved Hospital. Wheeler, whose accounts for dressings and drugs were always a first charge on the funds,

briskly seconded the motion for adoption. A mere matter of form; for the last ten years the accounts had been passed without comment. Mr. Perry hurried to put the proposal to the meeting; but before he could speak John Morse was on his feet.

He stood there, foursquare, robust, a blunt contrast to Mr. Perry's gentility. He spoke awkwardly, brusquely, without any attempt at refinement. Mr. Gaige, he protested, had got hold of the wrong end of the stick. The Hospital wasn't beloved; it wasn't even theirs. It was supported—badly supported, he admitted—by a small section of the public and used by one even smaller. That, if they wanted to know the truth, was why it wasn't "beloved," why it was regarded with suspicion and even feared. They might get up bazaars and concerts and that and bring down the overdraft; but bazaars wouldn't do the trick. In another twelve-month they'd be back in the same old hole. If they wanted to know what was amiss with the Hospital, he'd tell them straight. It was wrong because it was run different from any other hospital in the district. It was run as a nursing-home for the benefit of the doctors. A voice from the back of the hall cried; "Shame!" It was a shame. He agreed. No poor person—and the place was intended for poor persons—could be expected to stump up for medical attendance and hospital charges as well.

Mr. Perry stirred uneasily. Craig's yellow teeth showed themselves in an unpleasant smile.



That was a state of affairs, Morse went on steadily, which couldn't be found in any other hospital he'd ever heard of. It was that, and nothing else, that made the place a byword and kept folk like himself, even though he *was* on the committee, from subscribing to it as he'd have liked to. If the scandal was got rid of he knew that there wasn't a works in the district that wouldn't put up its own subscription list. Not only would the committee be able to meet their expenses; they'd have money to spare for the free admission of people who couldn't afford to pay their present charges. Folk would begin to feel that the place was really their own and not just a convenience for the medical staff.

Mr. Perry could stand it no longer. "Am I to understand, Mr. Morse," he asked, scandalized, "that you are attacking the medical staff, to whom the Hospital owes its continued—er—usefulness? As chairman of the Hospital Committee since its—er—inception, I must protest against that suggestion. We are grateful, deeply grateful,"—he turned toward Craig—"for our medical friends' continued devotion and advice. If you, Mr. Morse, were a substantial subscriber, which, on your own admission, you are not, we might listen to you with more confidence and—er—respect. As it is, you may take my word that what you are suggesting is impracticable."

"I'm going to make it practical, Rector. Just you wait a bit!" Morse continued sturdily. "Mr. Clarke here says we've got an overdraft of one hundred and fifty-three

pounds. It that right?" Clarke nodded. "Very well. I'm prepared, Mr. Perry, to pay off that overdraft." The back of the room broke into sudden applause. Morse held up his hand. "Furthermore," he went on more loudly "I'm prepared to make a donation of a thousand pounds, to put the place on its feet again."

"Most handsome, most handsome! A splendid example," Mr. Perry began. . . .

"*Provided*," Morse held up his thick hand again, "provided that the doctors are willing to meet me half-way. Provided they consent, as all other hospital doctors do, to treat the Hospital as the charitable institution it's supposed to be. Now that's a bargain. If they'll do without the fees they've been taking, I'll make it my business to see that the Hospital's a success. Mind you, this isn't hot air. I've talked to the Union Officials. You can take it from me the Trade Unions will be behind it. So I'll trouble you, Mr. Perry, to put my proposal to the doctors. Otherwise I shall move an amendment; I shall propose to reject this annual report on the grounds that the Hospital is not fulfilling the purpose for which it was intended."

The moment was an awkward one for Mr. Perry. "This," he admitted, "is a great surprise to me. I may say that the committee's report has never been questioned before." A vulgar laugh arose from Morse's supporters at the back of the room. Mr. Perry quelled it with a look with which he would have rebuked laughter in Church. "However, in view of Mr. Morse's

generous offer, I feel I must ask for an expression of medical—er—opinion.”

He cast a glance of entreaty in Craig's direction. Craig did not move a muscle of his face. He stared contemptuously in front of him toward the back of the room. Repulsed, in this quarter, the Rector's eyes turned toward Jonathan. Craig's followed their direction. If ever hatred were written on a human face it might have been read in his.

“I entirely agree with Mr. Morse,” Jonathan said, “I accept his conditions willingly.”

Mr. Perry's lips curled in an uneasy smile; his eyes accused Jonathan of having shown the exact type of treachery that might have been expected of him. They singled out Lucas from the obscurity in which he sat huddled. Once more Craig's glance followed them with such intensity that Jonathan, without seeing Lucas, could imagine that faint heart quailing beneath it. Lucas rose to his feet and cleared his throat.

“I think Mr. Chairman,” his weak voice replied, “that there is a good deal to be said on both sides.” Damned rat! thought Jonathan. “However,” Lucas continued, taking courage from the applause that had greeted Jonathan, “however, in view of Mr. Morse's generous offer, and considering that I myself am quite unimportant as far as the Hospital is concerned, I don't think I can honestly stand in the way of the public's wishes. I agree.”

His descent on the popular side of the fence was

acclaimed with a mixture of laughter and applause. What would Craig do? Once more the Rector turned a piteous glance toward him, entreating that he should not be deserted in his supreme distress.

Craig rose slowly. The room grew silent. Never in his life had Jonathan been more aware of the potency of this gaunt man's personality. His coarse mouth was as hard as stone, his eyes like steel.

"I have nothing to add," he replied, "except that neither my partner nor myself will submit to this species of blackmail. Dr. Monaghan and I both wish to tender our resignation as members of the Hospital staff."

He sat down abruptly, confidently awaiting the effects of this ultimatum. Poor Mr. Perry was in purgatory. In his eyes Craig was essential to the success of the Hospital. Indeed, Craig *was* the Hospital. In every detail of its management he had been dependant on Craig's suggestions, Craig's advice. Out of this disaster he saw the burden of personal responsibility taking shape.

"This is a great blow to all of us," he said. "I know that I have the whole committee, I'm sure I have the whole meeting with me, when I beg you, Dr. Craig, to reconsider your decision."

Craig shook his head implacably.

"If, even temporarily," Mr. Perry began. . . .

A coarse rasping voice rose from the back of the hall. Its owner was a man named Machen, a black-browed Welshman, one of the leaders of the miners' union.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, "I beg to second and associate myself with Mr. Morse's amendment. We workmen feel that this 'as gone on too long. We thank Dr. Dakers and Dr. Lucas for their acquiescence. I shall see to it personally that my union supports them."

The back of the room burst into a fury of applause. John Morse sat twiddling his big thumbs, gazing at the ceiling with a smile on his face. Craig also smiled; but his smile had the ugliness of a satanic pride. He rose, superbly, and walked out of the room. This fallen angel had his dignities.

END OF BOOK TWO

BOOK THREE

KINGDOMS OF THE EARTH



# *KINGDOMS OF THE EARTH*

## CHAPTER I

### TEMPTATION ON UFFDOWN

THE devil took Jonathan up into a high mountain called Uffdown and shewed him, apparently without conditions, the kingdoms of the earth. That solitude had salved the humiliations of childhood. Now at the zenith of material success, on a golden evening of early August, he returned to it through an air rich and still, stirred by no sound but the crackle of bursting gorse-pods. The smoke of his pipe curled upward slow and straight, like the smoke of farmsteads lost in the green of ripening orchards six hundred feet beneath. He lay extended on the warm turf, thrilled by a soft content, pleasantly out of breath with the exertion of the steep ascent. And the sense of freedom and elevation that filled his body, the sight of those wide and fruitful prospects on which his eyes rested, seemed symbolical of his spiritual satisfaction in a long climb accomplished and in the fruits of a victory almost embarrassing in its completeness.

One devil had been vanquished—not that familiar, proud spirit who now kept him company, but the other, who had tried to make Wednesford a foretaste of



purgatory. Gambler though he might be, no man of Craig's undoubted capacity should have dared to risk a card so hazardous as that which he had thrown in the Hospital committee's face. From the moment when Morse put forward his proposal Jonathan knew that his adversary was cornered, that reason must compel him to capitulate. But Craig was no longer amenable to reason. Confident in a tradition of undisputed power, he honestly believed that the Hospital could not exist without him; that the committee, accustomed to his guidance and support, would add their resignation to his own. His pride and his hatred of his opponent blinded him. To any other opponent he might have submitted; but nothing, not even Monaghan's anxious whispers, could persuade him to admit defeat by Jonathan. This meeting should be his Moscow. With his own hands he had fired the abandoned city. He retired from it in the proud certainty that sooner or later, he would march back in triumph.

For once, and indeed for the first time in his twenty odd years at Wednesford, Craig had miscalculated. The tide of popular favour, whose undertow Jonathan had felt as soon as the romantic circumstances of the case were made public, gathered volume rapidly when it became known that nobody, except Jonathan himself, need expect to lose money by it. For years everyone had realized that something was wrong with the Hospital. What that something was they had not dared to enquire for fear that the discovery might make

uncomfortable demands on their pockets or their indolence. But now that Morse, a man already credited with an instinct for successful organization, had put his finger on the spot, they eagerly accepted his prescription, which had the virtue of ruthlessness and novelty, as a panacea. In the minds of people obsessed by money-making, gestures of generosity kindle a vicarious satisfaction; and Jonathan, emerging battered but triumphant from this passage of arms, found himself suddenly not only a prominent but even a popular figure, representing, cheaply and, as it were, by proxy, the social conscience of Wednesford.

These acclamations bewildered him; they even went, a little, to his head. The final episodes of the long campaign had been so brief, so violent; the result, to tell the truth, so unexpected, the relief so astonishing, that he hardly realized what had happened. This only he knew; that Wednesford, from being a narrow alley through which he had struggled dourly, blindly, convinced in moments of reflection that sooner or later he would find himself confronted by a stone wall, had suddenly opened out into spaces as wide and full of promise as those which he now surveyed from the top of Uffdown.

He hadn't been able to make old Hammond see it in that light. To Hammond the essential part of the triumph lay not in Jonathan's victory but in Craig's defeat, over which he brooded and gloated with the vindictiveness of a Hebrew prophet. The God of Battles had eased him of his adversaries and avenged

him of his enemy; they should lick the dust like a serpent; the destruction, that cometh as a whirlwind, had brought them to a perpetual end. This divine vindication of righteousness put new life into Hammond; his old eyes shone with a wolfish brightness; his very back grew straighter, and when he went stumping out into the streets it was not, as of old, with the dogged pessimism of a broken man, but with a smile on his lips and in his glance, the challenge of a *nunc dimittis* in which there was no humility.

As for Jonathan he was neither proud nor humble. For him the world did not stand still, as for old Hammond. Spring passed, and its epidemics left an aftermath of illness that not only laid claim on every moment of his waking life but even encroached upon his sleep. From dawn to midnight he was working "all out" and found, in that labour, the consolation of a promise that was no longer in doubt. His new popularity increased his business. New names—the names, Rachel told him, of patients who had once belonged to the practice but had left it for Craig—began to appear on his books. The Hospital absorbed him more and more; for Craig's defection had cut off more than two-thirds of its normal supply of patients; and since nobody would have been happier than Craig to see it empty and prove that it could not continue to be useful without him, Jonathan spent all his strength in dispelling the prejudice of the Wednesford working-people against it.

Little by little, this conversion was accomplished. The

nursing staff, at first rebellious, began to realize that, even without Craig, the place would continue to exist. Miss Jessell, the matron, obligingly performed *suttee*, adding her resignation to Craig's. The committee, left for once to themselves, chose for their new matron a woman trained in North Bromwich, whom Jonathan had casually known at Prince's as Sister in one of Lloyd Moore's wards. As a crowning mercy Lucas had sold his nucleus of a practice, and the man who bought it was none other than Arthur Martock, the friend of Jonathan's childhood in Halesby. At last he had found a competent anæsthetist. It seemed as though all his old surgical ambitions were soon to be realized.

And then, at the end of June, Harold had qualified. That he could possibly fail had never entered into Jonathan's calculations; and though the exigencies of the cricket season, which naturally came first, had prevented him from taking a brilliant degree, his comparative failure cut both ways: the desire to continue playing for Worcestershire had induced him to surrender other ambitions and to accept the original plan of a partnership with Jonathan. The fact that the practice had doubled itself, as Lloyd Moore prophesied, probably weighed with him; for Harold's frank and charming ways were appreciative of the main chance. But to Jonathan all that mattered was the result: the unexpected fulfilment of his dear desire.

Of course, if Harold joined him in Wednesford, it would be ridiculous for Mrs. Dakers to stay on alone at

Chadshill. The Chadshill lease was providentially ending at Michaelmas. On the same date old Hammond was due, by his agreement, to hand over the practice, whose purchase had been completed, and surrender the Wednesford house, which was included in it. The hardest part of the whole business had been persuading Mrs. Dakers to abandon Chadshill. For the sake of Jonathan alone she would certainly not have considered it; but the fact that Harold had decided to join forces with him and had added his entreaties to Jonathan's had tipped the balance, and Mrs. Dakers had already been persuaded to emerge from her Nirvana into the first stages of this momentous uprooting.

Naturally, the practical part of the business devolved on Jonathan; for this was a rôle that Mrs. Dakers had never yet been called upon to play, and Harold, having earned a holiday, had disappeared on a round of country-house cricket parties which would last until he took up his surgical house-appointment at Prince's in September.

The breaking-up of these two established households—the departure of old Hammond and Rachel to the modest retirement which they had chosen in the Wolverbury Road, and Mrs. Dakers' avulsion from Chadshill—were the only melancholy circumstances in Jonathan's present life. The prospect of his retirement from practice, although, for all practical purposes, he had already retired, filled Hammond with a disquietude more sombre than that of death itself. For the last month he had been prowling about the surgery with the

uneasiness of a cat which knows that its masters are going on a journey. The details of packing terrified him. At times he grew fidgety over the thought that some utterly unimportant part of his possessions might be forgotten. At others, with a blank, bewildered resignation, he abandoned all interest in them.

"What does it matter?" he would ask Rachel, who bore the brunt of these alternating moods. "What does it matter, huh? You know quite well that I'm done for. With you it's different; you can make a fresh start. But I'm too old a tree to bear transplanting; all that you can do with me is to tear up the roots. Another winter will finish it. What does it matter?"

Sometimes he seemed to glean a bitter satisfaction from the distress which these forebodings produced in Rachel; his pessimism wore her down; she grew grim and pale.

"If he starts by feeling like that," she asked Jonathan, "how will it end?"

He could not conceal the fact that he shared her fears.

"But you mustn't give in," he told her. "You mustn't meet trouble half-way."

Between them they conceived a plan, approved by Harold, to separate the leaving of the house from the abandonment of the practice. Rachel, it was decided, should continue her work as dispenser, coming in each day at surgery-time from Wolverbury Road; and though, by the terms of the agreement, her father's

interest in the practice was ended, there seemed no reason why he shouldn't continue to amuse himself by visiting a few of his old patients professionally until the time, a year thence, when Harold's house-appointments should be over.

"It's only the suddenness of the change that frightens him," Jonathan told her. "Physically, he's not bad for his age; and if once we tide over the break he'll pick up again. Incidentally, an arrangement of this kind that keeps him moderately busy will make things easier for you, and so for me. If I had to lose you as well as him I honestly don't know what I should do."

"Dispensers are common enough," she said.

"But you're not common. I wonder if you'll ever realize how much I owe to you? In all those bad old times! Why, I know that I should never have pulled through them without you."

"The bad old times," she repeated . . . "But how exciting they were! Do you remember that first day, when we cleaned out the surgery? Of course it was nothing; but now, when I look back at it, I can't help feeling how adventurous, how happy it all seemed. It's only five years ago," she spoke musingly, "and yet I feel as though it were part of my childhood. Do you ever realize, Jonathan, that I'm growing old?"

He laughed the idea away; and yet it was true. Her mouth was firmer, her eyes even more sombre than those which he remembered on the day of his arrival; the blackness of her hair was streaked and softened with

strands of infrequent silver. In those first days her face had been secret and enigmatic; her silences had compelled him to speculate on what she was thinking. Now, he wondered no longer. The greater part of her mystery had vanished in their growing intimacy, revealing behind it an image of frankness, generosity and peculiar steadfastness; a woman whose heart concealed nothing but an instinctive timidity which gave to her maturer beauty an aspect childlike and appealing. Yet, strangely enough, it was rarely that Jonathan thought of her as being beautiful. Controlled by some inhibition of which he himself was unconscious, he had come to regard her as a natural and essential part of his daily life, an element accepted, yet never analysed, in the atmosphere that surrounded him.

Yes, Rachel was growing older. He viewed the fact objectively, not realizing that he himself had suffered the same change. Five years of practice in Wednesford, four years and more of collar-work, had left their mark on Jonathan as well. The enthusiasm that ran like wine in his blood when first he embarked upon the Wednesford venture was somewhat tempered now that smooth water promised him harbourage. The influences which had modified his spiritual vigour had also, providentially, mitigated the gravity of the difficulties that he was called upon to face. Nowadays he didn't take life quite so seriously; the sense of opposition and frustration no longer whipped his blood into a fury. These things, he had learned, were part of the day's work.



Sufficient unto each day its tale of evil. Life, as the spectacle of old Hammond and the experience of practice assured him, was too short to be wasted in vain rebellion. Harold, dear boy, was as impatient as he had been. He sympathized. Harold would learn.

Not only thus, but physically, the Wednesford years had changed him. His figure had broadened and, as it were, set into a firmer mould. A single deep furrow divided a brow that grew higher; two others descending from nostril to lip defined the limits of muscles that were more often contracted in determination than relaxed in smiles. Even in repose the mouth looked rather grim. Indeed, his whole face, in which the undistinguished features had once seemed moulded from some plastic material, now gave the impression of rough sculpture chiselled out of the same granitic matrix as the rest of his bulk, its contours revealing a strong jaw and cheek-bones which the softer and more elastic tissues of youth had concealed. The dark hair over his temples was not, like Rachel's, streaked with discreet threads of white, but frosted as with a grey rime which made the head seem longer, and accentuated the impression that it was carved out of stubborn stone. If there was more poise, more confidence, more character in his face than ever before, its features betrayed the stresses out of which these qualities had been achieved. "Why, Jonathan, do you know you're very nearly becoming handsome?" Edie had mocked him, at their last meeting.

And it was almost true. At least he had changed so much that when, trudging down that evening from Uff-down to Chadshill to see how his mother was getting on in Harold's absence, he met and hailed a couple of farm-hands whom he had known all his life, they didn't appear to recognize him.

He found Mrs. Dakers waiting, as usual—presumably for her transfer to Wednesford at the end of the next month. Harold, she grumbled, hadn't written her a line; but when Jonathan sympathized with her, she was up in arms at once. Nobody was allowed to criticise Harold but herself. Now that the decision to leave Chadshill had been forced on her—for they had let her imagine that the lease could not be renewed—she was prepared to contemplate the move in an attitude very different from that of poor old Hammond. She faced it without a single qualm of anxiety. Harold and Jonathan had decided to move her. Well, let them do so! That was their business. She had never moved in her life before, and knew nothing about such things. Apparently she expected to be transferred, with the rest of the furniture, in an attitude of dignified protest, like a saint's image carried in procession. For herself, she had no intention of raising a finger to help them. Mr. Dakers would certainly have washed his hands of the whole business, and she did likewise; but if anything should happen to herself or any of her belongings in the process, let them beware!

At the same time she pestered Jonathan with purely

academic questions. How many men would be needed? At what time of the day would they arrive? Would she be able to sleep at Wednesford the night after leaving Chadshill? Had Jonathan arranged a proper place for Mr. Dakers' manuscripts? Which room would be emptied first? She reminded Jonathan of a patient under spinal anæsthesia, watching, with interested detachment, the progress of an operation on his own unfeeling tissues. Her attitude was wholly impersonal. Perhaps she was not a person. But whether she was or wasn't mattered little to Jonathan in comparison with the fact that she had made no difficulties.

That night, as he cranked his car and drove through the Uffmoor lanes, where pale moths fluttered like huge snowflakes across the white glare of his headlights out of those cloudy thickets of cow-parsley, heaped like cumulus, that were the ultimate pomps of dying summer, Jonathan was at peace with all the world. By a swift turn of her wheel, fortune had given him all things that he desired—save only Edie, and now he was old and wise enough to realize that visions of desire might materialize when they were least expected.

At midnight, when he had left the Fatherless Bairn ridge behind him, he heard, above the rattling explosions of his exhaust, another sound, familiar enough, yet, at this moment, out of place. It was the tragic minor triad of the Wolverbury siren, echoing under the night like the bugles of an army in retreat. Behind him another great voice shook the air. It was the deep-toned

“bull” of the Great Mawne Furnaces. Swiftly, as though some sudden alarm had roused a forest full of sleeping monsters, the syrens of Dulston, of Sedgebury, of Wednesford, opened their throats. That ultimatum! Was it possible that this war, of which he had been too busy to think—this war with Germany, about which old Hammond had been growling over his *Daily Mail*, had actually come at last? There passed through his body a thrill of awe, a gust of patriotic sentiment of the kind which, as a schoolboy, he had felt on the relief of Mafeking. His mind was crossed by a momentary vision of the British battle-fleet; grey shadows sweeping sullenly out into the North Sea. England, inviolable! Behind that barrier of moving steel all was secure. Thank God for those eight Dreadnoughts!

And then, with a quick tremor of disquietude, he realized that Edie was in Germany. For the moment that was all that the great war meant to Jonathan.

## CHAPTER II

### FOG OF WAR

To Wednesford, and the Black Country in general, it meant little more. The departure of the first reservists sent a shiver of enthusiasm through the little town; but as soon as they were gone the news from Flanders, which came in daily with the North Bromwich papers, was little more than a happy anticipation of the football season's excitements. Old Joe Hingston at Wolverbury and Walter Willis at Mawne might sit at the end of a telephone wire in anxious colloquy with Admiralty or War Office, or overwhelm visiting officials with the hospitable amenities of their luxurious homes; George Hingston might impress the neighbourhood by driving through it in the Territorial captain's uniform which he wore at the works; but to the mass of the workers at Wednesford, as typified by the inhabitants of Higgins's Buildings, the main significance of these sombre events was nothing but higher wages, overtime, and a full stomach.

They had been told, in their workshops and in the pulpit, where Mr. Perry, inspired by his wife's military traditions, had scoured the Old Testament, successfully, for bellicose and bloodthirsty texts, that the destinies of the nation lay in the hands of God; all that was

demanding of them was that they should "do their bit" in the station to which their employers had called them. When the first Zeppelins emptied their bomb-shoots into Sir Joseph's park at Stourford, they found that exploit another example of the stupidity which had driven the grey wave of Germans to be shattered against the *glacis* of Liège. A war that provided diversion as well as employment and scattered profuse gold in exchange for their iron was nothing but a blessing without disguises. Never before had duty carried with it rewards so tangible. The only flaw in this enchanting prospect was an uneasy scepticism as to how long it would last.

From the first moment Jonathan benefited materially. The rush of prosperity added a new impetus to his rising fortunes. Wednesford, accustomed to improvidence, was ready to spend as quickly as it earned. Old bills, which Jonathan had regarded as hopeless, began to be paid. A visit to the doctor, formerly an expensive luxury, came to be regarded as one of the privileges of a full purse. People were reminded of ailments that poverty had forced them to forget, adding impartially a bottle of medicine and one of whisky to their week-end shopping list. On Saturday nights the surgery was crowded to suffocation.

Not only into the district as a whole but into many individuals this festival of death breathed new and spurious life. It roused old Hammond from his pessimistic resignation. Forgetting the terrors of retirement

this old fighter was roused to a passionate interest in all that was happening. His wolf-eyes shone with a hard and righteous indignation. The will to win revived his will to live. No scrap of news or rumour escaped the teeth of his mind. The new community of interest conquered his diffidence. He walked the streets erect, with shining eyes, eagerly discussing the War with people whose company he had previously avoided. They were all "in it"! He wanted, once more, to take his active share of the practice, to "do his bit," as everybody was urged to do.

"My God!" he would say, "if only I were younger! If only this chance had come to me forty years ago! Well, I've some life in me yet. I'm an old man; but if they want you, Dakers, I'm not so finished that I can't carry on."

The Medical Association had sent round circulars asking for volunteers. Jonathan showed them to him and to Rachel.

"Of course you'll go," said Hammond. "Don't think of me."

"I've sent in my name," Jonathan told them, and flushed with pride.

"Good lad, good lad!" said old Hammond. Rachel went white.

But nothing further happened. The County Insurance Committee refused to release "panel" doctors who had long lists of patients; they had their duty to the civilian population which, in places like Wednesford,

was increasing as imported labour swarmed into the heavy industries. It came as a shock to them all when Martock, who had taken Lucas's practice, was called up.

"Lucky devil," said Hammond. "If only I were younger!"

Then, suddenly, Craig also appeared in uniform. Ever since the affray at the Hospital Craig had been restless. Good gamblers cut their losses. His exalted connections had given him friends at the War Office. Monaghan, an active partner, was capable of looking after the practice; and the fact that he, an elderly man, did not hesitate to show his patriotism in the indisputable form of wearing khaki, was a signal vindication of his caste (in the circles where that counted) and of his courage in the eyes of those who had flouted him. His massive features, his firm, upright figure gave the impression that he had been born to wear uniform. Jonathan surveyed him with envy, though he knew quite well that a man of Craig's age would never reach the front.

"He's stolen a march on us this time," Hammond grunted. "He's got all the credit without an atom of danger. That's just like Craig! These fools don't know the difference. To them a uniform's a uniform. They've begun to talk already as if Craig were a hero, damn them!"

It was true. Whenever Craig came over on week-end leave and Jonathan saw him in the streets, where he took care to show himself, he felt the contrast; though,



heaven knew, if arduous work were an excuse for wearing mufti Jonathan had enough and to spare. Harold also, by this time, was in uniform. The Prince's Hospital had been placed on a military basis; its wards had been expanded to receive convoys of wounded, and Harold, as house-surgeon, had been given rank as lieutenant. The uniform, which saved him from reproach, gave no salve to his conscience.

"It's fantastic," he complained to Jonathan, "that a fellow of my age should be kept here doing civilian work like this. I'm the only member of the Cambridge team who isn't in the trenches. I feel like dying of shame when I hear of them. Two killed and five wounded out of my lot already. I've done my best to get round Lloyd Moore. But not a bit of it! The war'll be over before I get my chance."

Jonathan tried to soothe him. In his inmost heart he was deeply thankful that Harold had been side-tracked at Prince's. By this time the human débris that was shot back on Wednesford like scrap metal had begun to show the real meaning of war. When he saw Harold, so handsome and gallant in his khaki, his imagination shuddered at the thought of that same figure crushed and mutilated with thousands of others in the bloody Flanders mud. Not only for his own, but for his mother's sake; for Mrs. Dakers, in the providential bewilderment of those stirring weeks, had been successfully transported to Wednesford, where, in the dim living-room previously occupied by old Hammond, she

had succeeded in establishing an imitation of the Chads-hill study, with Mr. Dakers' desk and chair, his manuscripts and reading-lamp disposed in their proper order.

It was Harold's visits, more than anything else, that contributed to her rapt illusion of continuity. Jonathan, on whom the whole burden of the move had naturally fallen, still counted for nothing. Her sense of the theatre found enchantment in Harold's uniform; in the clink of his spurs, the polish of his riding-boots, the brilliance of his buttons—in the general air of dressing-up that was given to him by a costume better adapted to any charge in the world than that which he was performing: the care of the contagious wards at Number Forty Four General Hospital.

Responding to the familiar stimulus of limelight, of which she had been deprived for so long; she became a voluminous epitome of all the mothers in Shakespeare. Shakespeare, apart from Coriolanus, was weak in mothers; so Calpurnia, before the Ides of March, and Cleopatra before Actium were drawn on rather heavily for the atmosphere with which she chose to envelop her "soldier son," as she called him—seeing, with complete honesty, something far more soldierly in Harold's "spit and polish" than in the grim figures, bowed beneath their weight of mud and iron, who straggled back to Wednesford on leave from the front. It was natural that she should relate the whole catastrophe to Mr. Dakers' works. There were passages in *Alfred of England* that

had clearly anticipated it; the national spirit of patriotism that was now abroad had been the derided central tenet of his religion.

"If only," she told Harold, "your dear father could see you now! I am certain he himself would have been among the first to volunteer. I recall quite well his saying that the Germans—or was it the French?—were our hereditary enemies."

In her hatred, her vindictiveness toward Germany, Mrs. Dakers was as ardent and uncompromising as old Hammond himself. It seemed curious and somewhat sinister to Jonathan that this passion, which spelt death to so many thousands of the younger generation should put new life into the older.

Then Edie came back from Elberfeld, and removed the heaviest anxiety that the war had laid on him. During its first weeks he had dared to telephone several times to Silver Street and ask about her. The Martyns could tell him nothing. Lord Clun, and his brother, Lord Arthur Powys, who, as a director of the Mawne Furnaces, was in touch with the War Office, had pulled every possible diplomatic string to get news of her; but no news had come through. To judge from Sheila's tone in answering his enquiries it seemed as though the Martyns were rather proud of Edie's isolation; by being shut up in Germany she was "doing her bit" in much the same way as Alec, now a subaltern in the Irish Guards, and George Delahay, already a regular, who had escaped from the clutches of the youngest Powys

girl, who had snatched him from Sheila, to serve a sterner mistress in the retreat from Mons.

"What are *you* doing, Dr. Dakers?" Sheila asked firmly. When he told her that he was still working in Wednesford, she answered: "Oh, really?"

The first that Jonathan knew of Edie's return was the sound of her voice on the telephone. She was taking up an appointment almost immediately, she told him, at Stourford Castle, Lady Hingston's Voluntary Hospital. She would love to see him, if only for a few moments. "I telephoned just on the chance. Sheila happened to tell me you'd been enquiring. I never imagined that I should find you still at Wednesford," she said.

With considerable difficulty Jonathan freed himself from work and met her in North Bromwich. Edie herself was in uniform, with the red and white brassard of the Almeric Paget Massage Corps. Those uncertain weeks in Germany had told on her; her face was thin, drawn, older, and of an almost transparent pallor. To Jonathan she looked reduced and pitiful and more utterly adorable than ever; but, this time, she did not put up her face for him to kiss.

Indeed, the first question she asked him was: "Where's Harold?" He told her. "I'm glad he's still in England," she said. "I was afraid I should miss seeing either of you."

"The Insurance Committee refuse to release me," he

explained. "Harold, of course, already has his commission."

"He must look perfectly splendid in uniform," Edie said. "I should love to see him. Just write down his address for me, Jonathan dear."

He did so, rather reluctantly. In the ecstatic moment of regaining her he didn't want to waste time over Harold. It was Edie's self that he wanted. He begged her to tell him all her German adventures.

"I didn't meet the Elberfeld horses after all," she said. "When the war broke out the *Krankenhaus* became a military hospital at once. The sisters were very sweet; but, of course they suspected me. The most fantastic stories! They assured me that their Zeppelins had wiped out London and North Bromwich. They said that England was as good as out of the war already. Then the wounded soldiers began to come in from Liège, and Antwerp and Mons. I had to nurse them, poor things. They were so pathetic; you really couldn't dislike them. But when they got to know I was English they hated me. They used to whisper "*Spion!*" behind my back. The senior surgeon told me that the police wouldn't answer for my safety if I showed myself outside. Six weeks, without a single breath of fresh air! Then, one day, he gave me a paper—not a passport—just a certificate to say that I'd worked dutifully in the hospital and was returning to England. It acted like magic; you'd never have believed it. Everything went swimmingly till I got to a place near the frontier called

Goch. Goch was a fortress. They turned me out of the train there. I had to spend the night in a railway refreshment room crowded with soldiers. I simply didn't dare to ask for food, because they'd have been certain to have recognized my English accent. As it happened, not one of them spoke to me; I was in luck. And then, in the train, Jonathan, there was an adorable duck of a Dutch guard. When we passed the frontier he came into my compartment and told me we were in Holland. He brought me some *café au lait*: the first food I'd tasted for twenty-four hours. They simply starved us, you know, in Elberfeld. All the good food in Germany was reserved for the soldiers. Yes, it was pretty awful; still I wouldn't have missed it for anything." But her lips trembled as she spoke.

"My dear child," Jonathan told her, "you need a good rest."

"Rest? My dear Jonathan, whatever are you talking about? I'm starting work to-morrow at Stourford. I'm afraid I must be going now."

Her mind had never been with him; yet, when they parted, she was sufficiently composed to remind him that he'd forgotten to give her the paper on which he had scribbled Harold's address.

When she had gone, to the habitual sense of emptiness with which parting from her always affected him there was added a new disquietude. This meeting had turned out differently from anything that his passion had expected; its anticipated ardours had fallen

flat. It seemed to Jonathan as if Edie had actually been nearer to him when she was lost in Germany. She still smiled on him, called him "Jonathan dear"; but the phrase and the smile were mechanical.

He returned to Wednesford and the pressure of neglected work haunted by the lack of any reasonable explanation for this fiasco. Did it lie hidden, perhaps, in the hints which her letters had given him of that love-affair in Sweden? Did his company seem pathetic after that acute experience? These damned foreigners! Jonathan reflected, bitterly. Or was it, perhaps, that she had been disappointed at not finding him in khaki? Women, even such women as Edie, were susceptible to external appearances. He had seen her eyes stray toward the uniformed figures that surrounded them in the North Bromwich tea-shop, and had been at some pains to explain his own position; to assure her that he had volunteered in the beginning, and was even now at the disposal of the military authorities whenever they chose to call on him. But verbal explanations of that kind were not enough. What women desired was not words, but something that they could see with their own eyes, some satisfying symbol, like a service tunic.

Returning to Wednesford by train—for petrol was now precious, and he had left his car behind—he became aware of his own reflection in the mirror opposite to him, and realized that the figure which he presented was anything but heroic. In the recent pressure of work he had not given much attention to his appearance. He

saw himself assimilated to the colouring of Wednesford, a rough and rather seedy figure, with bagged trouser-knees and a fringed collar, provincial and unmistakably civilian: the very negation of all military smartness. Was it possible, he wondered, that Edie had been ashamed of him; that she, in her smart blue uniform, felt compromised by his company?

He gave her credit for more reasonableness than that. And yet—and yet she was a Martyn, a member of the caste from which the officers of the regular services were drawn, the caste which had fallen, instinctively, into rank on the first bugle-call, the caste among whom a sense of military duty was bred in the bone. Edie, in her rebellion, had emancipated herself from her caste's conventions, had identified herself with his own liberties of life and thought, yet now, obedient to an instinct more potent than volition, the inherent discipline of generations had reclaimed her; she had become, unconsciously, the daughter of soldiers—with the reaction of an old pensioner, whose body springs automatically to attention at a word of command.

"And that," he thought, "explains her anxiety about Harold's address. She'd be happier to show herself with Harold's two stars than with me in mufti. I'm just a poor damned civilian, and civilians don't count in these days." He remembered the words of Sheila on the telephone, her contemptuous "Oh, really?" He heard them again, with the same implications of scorn, in Edie's voice.



He talked it over with Rachel, not mentioning Edie. With regard to her, a convention of silence had long been established between them. He told Rachel how awkward he had felt among all the uniforms in North Bromwich.

"But don't you realize, Jonathan," she answered him reasonably, "that half—more than half of these officers whom you see have neither the chance nor the intention of going to the front? Everybody else knows that as well as I do. Take your brother, for instance. He's a case in point."

A case very much to the point, as Jonathan knew. Not through any fault of Harold's: Mrs. Dakers' "soldier son" was fretting at his own inactivity. But the fact remained that Harold's duties at the hospital were nominal. By midday his work was finished. All afternoon and evening he was free to parade his commission in the dance-halls of North Bromwich, to take in the streets the salutes of soldiers returned from the front.

While Jonathan, now burdened with Craig's practice and Martock's as well as his own, was working all out from dawn to sunset and often in the middle of the night as well; while Craig, as he knew, had dug himself into a snug administrative job at the Aldershot Medical Headquarters, well paid and well fed, with opportunities for golf and bridge unlimited, and continued to receive the fees that Jonathan earned from his patients! Yet Craig, when he swaggered back to Wednesford for frequent week-ends, was greeted in

the street as a hero, acclaimed by the Gaiges and Clarkes and Perrys as a paragon of patriotism, while Jonathan's position, as Mrs. Perry herself affirmed, was a scandal and a reproach to the neighbourhood. The fruits of the Hospital triumph went bitter on his tongue.

So the year passed; and still Jonathan was not released. The Derby scheme came in. Clarke, Gaige—even Mr. Perry appeared on the streets in red-coloured brassards that indicated their willingness to serve. Jonathan, in spite of the fact that he had volunteered long ago, presented himself at Wolverbury for examination. Rachel smiled.

"Do you really covet the distinction of appearing in the same category as Mr. Gaige?" she said.

"Any sign of being anxious to serve is better than none," he told her.

He enrolled, and wore his red crown, and was rather proud of it. Harold when he first saw it, considered it an excellent joke. By this time the efforts of his batman had reduced his brass buttons to a smoothness that argued long experience in the service. In a few more months he would be able to call himself Captain. Now that he had grown more familiar with the results of war in the shape of the maimed and shattered casualties which ambulance-trains discharged in hundreds at the hospital gates, he wasn't nearly so keen as he had been to get to France. His uniform gave him the exemption from popular criticism that he needed. For the rest, as a

good soldier, he was content to obey orders and stay where his superiors put him.

To tell the truth he was having a good time in North Bromwich. The fact of his wearing khaki enabled him to dispense with introductions to ladies who considered it their duty to make life pleasant for the heroes who protected them. He had been made a member of the travelling board that went out from the Central Hospital to examine officers in the Auxiliaries and Convalescent Homes. Among these he visited Stourford, the Hingstons' stucco castle, a hospital more lavishly equipped—as well it might be, considering Joe Hingston's war-profits—than any in the county. There he found Edie working in her white uniform, distinguished, in Lady Hingston's favour, from the mass of amateur nurses by her technical equipment and her august connection with the Cluns and Halbertons.

The spacious atmosphere of these great houses, even the mushroom magnificence of Stourford, fluttered Harold. Within them he felt spiritually at home. Theirs was the kind of life for which his nature and education had fitted him. These visits only made him despise the character of his calling, the serpent of Aesculapius which twined about his regimental badge instead of the Greys' spread-eagle which would so much better have become him. In hospital, however, the members of the visiting board were important personages. Lady Hingston treated them as such. When the afternoon's work was over she gave them tea, assisted by her

daughter-in-law, Clare Wilburn, who had lost her first husband—the boy whose eyes Jonathan had blacked at the Mawne Christmas party—in the Boer War. Edie was often invited to be present at these parties; and the fact that Harold had known the Martyns intimately augmented his dignity. His head was full of these encounters when he came to Wednesford.

“Edie’s improved enormously,” he told Jonathan. “You’d scarcely know her. Don’t you remember how I used to tell you, in the old days at Silver Street, that she was the best of the bunch?”

“You made a dead set at Sheila, all the same,” Jonathan reminded him.

“Oh, Sheila was all very well,” Harold continued. “But Sheila and I had very little in common. Dear Sheila’s eyes were always fixed on the main chance. She only put up with me as a temporary amusement. As soon as George Delahay came along she’d no more use for me. Edie’s quite different. So much more natural. And, as I say, she’s improved out of all knowledge. In looks, as well. That simple white get-up suits her. Among the Hingstons she looks—well, such a thoroughbred. By the way, she asked me to give you her love when I saw you.”

“The deuce she did! Well, give her my thanks when you see *her*.”

“You needn’t get huffy, Jonathan. She likes you. I’m sure she meant it.”

He laughed: "Then give her my love as well; I mean that too."

How much he meant it Harold could never guess. If anyone had suggested to him that Jonathan was in love with Edie he would have thought it a joke. There was something humorous to him in the idea of Jonathan being in love with anybody. Jonathan had never seemed cut out for amorous adventure; Jonathan had never been, like himself, a "ladies' man"; from the very beginning Jonathan's function in life had been defined, by Mr. Dakers and his mother, as that of a well-meaning creature of a subject race, whose uncouthness might be excused, by people who really knew him, because of the hidden virtues which compensated for his lack of all the graces. And Jonathan, as he now appeared, a somewhat seedy general practitioner on the verge of middle-age, surprisingly successful in the humble sphere which so exactly suited him, was, less than ever, a romantic figure. From the summit of his own military smartness Harold surveyed him with a friendly contempt. This was an age of soldiers; and no uniform on God's earth could make Jonathan soldierly. Poor old Jonathan!

In the meantime Harold continued his weekly visits to Stourford. His visits to Wednesford, already few and far between, became fewer and further. To Mrs. Dakers his absence gave him a new enchantment. Convinced that her soldier son was winning the war in the exact manner which Mr. Dakers would have wished, she

regarded that absence with pride, as a stern concession to duty.

Her views on the war were, characteristically, nebulous. Its intrinsic aspect was that of a personal conflict between Harold and the Kaiser. And Harold was quite prepared to leave it at that. The rôle of a superb avatar of Eugene Dakers' nationalistic ardours flattered him. He lapped up his mother's admiration without a smile, thanking his stars that Jonathan was willing and able to keep the old lady quiet. But though Mrs. Dakers looked to him for information on military matters and accepted it as though he were Chief of the General Staff, his conversation with Jonathan became devoted, more and more, to Edie. Whenever they were alone, the name of Edie was certain to crop up. Whatever they spoke of, the dormant obsession declared itself, forcing itself to the surface through subconscious channels that seemed, in the trend of their conversation, irrelevant, until, of a sudden, the batteries that had power to shatter Jonathan's world were unmasked.

Jonathan waited for those moments and dreaded them. It was, of course, a compliment to himself, an affirmation of their frank intimacy, that Harold should open his heart to him so trustingly. But Jonathan's side of that intimacy was anything but frank. He smiled, and pretended to encourage the confidences that wounded him. Wilfully he laid bare his breast to them, inviting pain; miserably anxious, under a veil of sympathy, to know the uttermost and the worst. Though he

did not dare to put the question bluntly, for fear of losing control of himself, he knew, by a hundred signs, that Harold was in love.

Was Edie in love with Harold? That, too, he dared not ask. The signs suggested that she must be. Would Harold appear so flushed and exalted—Harold, in his wide familiarity with easy conquests—if this engrossing passion were not returned? Dark hints, stray words, eagerly grasped, pondered, analysed, confirmed his conclusions. Harold was meeting her not only at Stourford but in North Bromwich. The conventional message: "Edie sends you her love," now came to him from different quarters—from theatre-parties, from dances; once, with a suggestion of sacrilege that made his heart go sick, from the dome of Uffdown, that mountain sacred to his dreams, on which, incredibly, Edie and Harold had walked together through a summer twilight.

And how could it be possible, he asked himself bitterly, that Edie should not be in love with Harold—with Harold, so gay, so brilliant, so gloriously the opposite of everything that Edie, in her charity, had smiled at in himself? All Harold's transcendent excellencies, which Jonathan not only admitted but adored, had power to wound him now by their very existence. The pain that they inflicted was deserved, the proper punishment for Jonathan's own jealousy. He found himself carried backward, as on a slowly revolving wheel, to that afternoon, six years before, the day of his father's death,

when, at the County Cricket Ground, he had seen in Edie's glance toward Harold a light which her eyes had never vouchsafed to him. He saw himself plodding along the grilling asphalt of the Bristol Road, throttled by a high starched collar, savagely swinging his stick, a callow, predestinate victim approaching the hidden catastrophe that had changed all their lives and overwhelmed this bewilderment in one far greater.

On that day—how well he remembered it!—he had taken refuge in whisky. But the Jonathan of those times, when escape was so easy, no longer existed. He was older now, and, perhaps, a little wiser. Faced with this new desolation he sought refuge in work. Not in the academic regions of pure research which, in the former calamity, had tempted and failed him, but in the human contacts of his practice which, of themselves, were capable of absorbing his thought, his emotion, his physical energies to the dregs. He filled his consciousness to the last cranny with work. To escape from his own thoughts he identified himself passionately with the sufferings, the hopes, the fears, the thankfulness of others. Yet, even so, Edie's beauty troubled his dreams. And Rachel Hammond, who watched him and laboured with him, knew that the eyes which smiled at her so bravely concealed a secret.

One evening, Harold, who had rarely been seen in Wednesford of late, arrived unexpectedly, in the middle of the surgery hour. He was all on fire. From the moment of his arrival the little house thrilled with



excitement, expectancy. He greeted Rachel and Jonathan with a high-pitched effusiveness. His mind was not with them. He paced the dispensary impatiently, slapping his gaitered calves with a riding-whip, waiting for Jonathan to finish dealing with a querulous patient as though the infirmities of others were a matter of small importance, a mere irritation. When Jonathan had got rid of his patient he came, smiling, to greet him; but as soon as he saw Harold's eyes his face darkened. For him this excitement could have only one explanation. Edie.

"Hello, old Jonathan," Harold said. "I thought you'd never get rid of that bore. I've got some news for you."

"What is it, Hal?" Jonathan asked, his lips forced again into a smile.

For answer Harold handed him an official envelope. "My orders," he said.

Jonathan read: *Prepare for immediate embarkation for Madras.* Madras? That was good reading. There was no war in Southern India. Supposing it had been Northern France!

"But my dear Hal, what topping luck!" he said.

Even as he spoke he was aware of a division in his mind: he was thankful to know that his visions of a body shattered and mangled would not be realized, to know that Harold was safe, but for the malignity of a chance torpedo. That was not all. He was just as thrilled, and at the same time ashamed, to perceive, in the separ-

ation of Harold from Edie, an end to his own tortures.

In India, if novelists were to be trusted, Harold would soon find other attractions. Edie, deprived of his presence, would soon forget him. The prospect made Jonathan tremulous with joy and shame commingled. The blow which they had all been dreading for so long had fallen; and behold, it brought deliverance!

Harold, in spite of the relief which he must have felt, took all Jonathan's congratulations grudgingly. The theatrical strain in his composition, inherited from Mrs. Dakers, showed itself at once.

"It's all very well to talk about there being no danger," he said. "But damn it all, Jonathan, it is a bit of a come-down! Here have I been, kicking my heels in North Bromwich for over a year waiting for the chance of active service, longing to do something, and then these blighters shoot me off to India. You mark my words, they'll keep me there for the rest of the war; probably I shall go through the whole business without seeing a shot fired, and come back at the end with nothing but a liver abscess to show for it. For all the fun I shall get out of it, they might just as well have left me where I am."

"Near Edie," Jonathan thought: "that's what he really means." And he hated himself for thinking it.

For the moment, however, his main concern was that of breaking the news to Mrs. Dakers; for his mother's militarism, as he knew, was only in the nature of a new theatrical rôle, and might easily be upset by contact with

this very mild reality. Harold would still be a hero; but whether her own reaction would be heroic was another matter.

In point of fact it was not heroic at all. Jonathan prepared the way for Harold's announcement carefully, airily expatiating on the fortunate lot of soldiers who were stationed in Indian garrisons. Mrs. Dakers, who had no idea what he was driving at, became critical. That point of view, she implied, was just like Jonathan. She couldn't imagine how any man of spirit could consent to pass the time in dancing, flirting and playing polo (she also had been reading Anglo-Indian novelists) when their comrades were fighting to the last gasp in Flanders. It made her shudder to imagine what Mr. Dakers would have thought of them. If he *had* lived to see it . . .

At this point Harold saved her from committing herself too deeply by showing her his orders. She stared at the paper blankly. Then fear came into her eyes. The fire of her oratory died down in them. They looked little, pitiful. The mother of the Gracchi became the mother of Harold. "Oh Hal, my darling," she cried and burst into tears: the first tears that Jonathan had ever seen in her eyes that were not theatrical.

Jonathan left them alone, he could do nothing else. He went into the dispensary, hoping to find Rachel, but Rachel had gone. She had locked up the waiting-room and left the surgery in darkness. In that sharp, aro-

matic air of tinctures he walked up and down. The sight of Mrs. Dakers' tears which were, as he knew, beyond his own powers of consolation, affected him deeply. This bundle of shabby theatrical properties, this wind-bag of bombast and sentiment, this intrinsication of the unreal—she was his mother, he loved her. Blindly, irrationally, just as he loved Edie.

When he came back to the living-room which Mrs. Dakers' piety had converted into a replica of her husband's study at Chadshill, her tears had ceased. She sat like a marble monument, as she had sat in the days that followed Mr. Dakers' death, with nothing but her red eyes to detract from her lips' composure. Harold was talking almost gaily of his new prospects, and Jonathan contributed to this atmosphere of forced gaiety. They sat down to supper with Mrs. Dakers as a *memento mori*.

In the middle of the meal another wire arrived for Harold. There had been a mistake in his orders, a clerical error. For "Madras" read "Mudros." Harold went pale. Mudros was the medical base for the Dardanelles. All their gay talk of garrison life in India, the polo, the dancing, the hunting at Ootacamund faded on their lips before the imagined shadow of that stony, blood-stained peninsula.

"Bad luck, old chap," said Jonathan.

But Harold, who, earlier in the evening, had been complaining that he wasn't sent to France, couldn't now very well retreat from the heroic position which he had

taken with so little risk. Fortified by another glass of whisky, he welcomed the change.

"Good luck, you should call it," he said. "It means anyway, that I've got my chance at last."

To Mrs. Dakers apparently, it made no difference. In her present state of mind Madras or Mudros meant much the same to her. All that she knew or cared for was the fact that she was losing Harold. And Harold, who hated to prolong the uncomfortable scene, announced, as soon as dinner was over, that he must return to North Bromwich. There would be heaps of things to attend to, he said. (*Edie*, thought Jonathan . . .)

But now that he knew Harold was really in danger these shameful reservations only flared momentarily, then faded away. His devotion, his anxiety, his admiration were all for Harold—Harold so handsome, so gallant, gaily, bravely accepting the challenge which the Age of Iron had flung at him; Harold, the adored paragon of his childish tradition; Harold, his brother. When Harold had kissed his mother goodnight, and perhaps goodbye, Jonathan stood with tears in his eyes in the dark passage.

"I'll walk down to the station with you, Hal," he said.

"No, Jonathan, don't bother. I can see you're tired, old chap."

He had the delicacy to feel that Harold would rather be alone, and acquiesced. They shook hands on the doorstep. Harold squared his shoulders. A magnificent

knightly figure he seemed to Jonathan as he went striding across the road. Jonathan's eyes followed his progress. When his figure had shrunk to the size of a pigmy under the darkness—there were no street lamps in Wednesford for fear of Zeppelins—Harold turned and waved a spectral goodbye.

Jonathan, his eyes still dimmed, closed the door behind him and returned to Mrs. Dakers. He entered with a smile on his lips. There was no smile on hers to encourage him. She sat, a poor withered old woman amid her draperies. Jonathan came close to her and laid his face against her cold cheek.

"Mother darling," he said . . .

With a movement of irritation she moved her head away from him.

"Now there is nothing, nobody left in my life," she said.

A poor compliment to Jonathan, whose own position, curiously enough, was identical.

## CHAPTER III

## THE SOLDIER SON

"Roll on the war!" the soldiers joked in the trenches. And the war rolled on, as though there were something organic in it, a natural rhythm that no human intervention could hasten or retard. Slowly, ponderously, it moved toward its logical conclusion, like a thesis of celestial argument approaching proof; like a fugal theme developed through contrapuntal mazes, gathering volume as it neared the final chord. "Roll on the war!" the Black Country echoed piously. Walter Willis, with his eye on his first million; Joe Hingston with a peerage dangled in front of him; George Higgins turning shell-cases by the thousand at his foundry; John Morse stamping nails for the hoofs of cavalry-chargers and boots of infantry; Mrs. Gaige's three Graces greedily hunting subalterns in the North Bromwich tea-shops; Mrs. Perry dragooning soldiers' wives and families (but not Mr. Perry, escaped from domestic tyranny and parish responsibilities in the Guards' dépôt at Brentwood); Joe Matthews, Ada's husband, "picking up" six pounds a week, to say nothing of overtime, in Higgins's shell factory.

Watered by blood and fertilized by gold, the desert

region round Wednesford blossomed as a rose. Even the derelict factories came to life again in fronds of plummy steam and flowers of fire. A steady stream of protected labour flowed in to feed its furnaces, filling the place of the anonymous hordes that ebbed away to feed other fires in Flanders, and did not return. George Hingston, Sir Joseph's heir, was blown to pieces beside his guns on the first day of the Somme. The Hingston chimney-stacks belched forth black smoke in greater volume; it hung upon the sky in tatters, like mourning pennons. Food became scarce and poor in quality. They rationed potatoes. Then, for the first time, Mrs. Dakers waxed indignant. Bread, meat—that was reasonable enough, she admitted to Jonathan. But potatoes! The potato became a symbol of the rights of man; the quest of potatoes her ruling passion. She pined for them, dreamed of them, consumed her ration voraciously, then starved and complained. Jonathan was thankful for any distraction that could rouse her from the progressive dementia into which Harold's departure had plunged her.

They heard very little of Harold. Before he reached Mudros the Gallipoli campaign had been abandoned. Now he was at Salonika, or rather in the Struma valley. His general presentability and his "blue" had hastened his promotion. Soon he was a Major, and the second in command of a field ambulance. The commander of his brigade was an old Harrovian. Hence mentions in despatches, a White Eagle of Serbia, a Military Cross,



and other tokens of social distinction which made him regret the time wasted in North Bromwich. Jonathan, without questioning how they had been earned, felt enormously proud of these decorations. When Harold wrote home he never mentioned Edie. Was that encouraging or sinister? Jonathan couldn't guess. As far as Edie herself was concerned he heard nothing. He didn't even know if she were still at Stourford.

A drab life, but a full one; full to exhaustion, for now the whole burden of practice in Wednesford fell on him, lightened a little by the astonishing activity of old Hammond, whose energies this providential emergency had renewed. The food restrictions had no effect on him. The more sparingly he ate, the better he felt. Indeed, his vigour thrived on deprivation; no man in Wednesford could have worked harder than he did. Jonathan wondered how long that sprint would last.

It lasted much longer than he imagined it would; but, in the middle of the following winter, it cracked suddenly. Jonathan found him in bed voicelessly protesting against an attack of acute bronchitis. Rachel was forced to leave her dispensing to nurse this fractious, virulent old child. Doctors, proverbially, were bad patients, and this one, who kicked against every order and prescription, was worse than most. His very anxiety to recover aggravated the disease; his restlessness harried poor Rachel to distraction. He persisted in talking incessantly by day and by night. The inflammation descended to his lungs. Pneumonia. The old

man's friend, they call it. For three weeks things looked black.

"He won't let me do a thing," Rachel complained, with tears in her dark eyes, as she and Jonathan talked in whispers on the landing outside a room from which there issued an odour of linseed meal, suspended in the vapour of steam-kettles, and the sound of cruel bouts of coughing. "I know you're hard pressed enough as it is at the surgery," she told him. "I hate to bother you. And yet . . . Oh, Jonathan, if you could only stop his coughing! It's terrible, terrible! Just listen to him now. I feel as if something must break sooner or later!"

He patted her shoulder. She smiled wanly. How much older she had grown! Small wonder, he thought; that invalid would turn anyone grey. And then there came into his mind a new concern: the prospect, all too probable, of the old man's dying, and of Rachel, brave girl, being left alone. During this harassing period, more than ever before, he had come to recognize her strength, her reliability, her common-sense. He could find no words to express the admiration that he felt for her. It was more than seven years since first they had met, and during all that time she had never failed him once. There was no woman in the world to match her. Not one! And he, Jonathan, was privileged to be her only friend. At the present moment she relied on him more completely than ever he had relied on her; and, that heaven knew, was "saying something"! Supposing that the worst should happen, and that she were left

lonely? Then, more than ever, his deep debt must be honoured. How? There was only one way in which it could be honoured. He knew it, and as he gazed at those dark eyes, in which, for the first time, he saw the shadow of fear, his own eyes blurred; and out of their mist he saw not Rachel's sad face, but the face of Edie, so pure and pale, with a faint, mocking smile on her lips.

With sheer, superhuman obstinacy old Hammond recovered. By the end of Spring he was up and out again, stumping the streets in his gaitered legs, a gnarled, frosty spectre, more wolfish and spiritually potent than ever. His recovery gave him a new arrogance. He boasted of it, and people, infected by his spirit, felt proud of him. This was the sort of man that Wednesford produced, a real Black Country type! For himself, the old man had the feeling that in defeating death he had defeated Craig. Never in all his forty-odd years of practice had he been such a popular figure. When patients congratulated him on his recovery he would laugh out loud:

"You thought I was done for, huh? That's all you know about me! You're not going to carry me to the churchyard till we've won this war."

That year the war seemed further than ever from being won. Even the Midlands' prosperity wore a grim air. Old faces vanished; new ones filled their place. The whole human content of Wednesford was being shuffled continually; even the population of Higgins's

Buildings was changed. A new race, which had never heard of Craig or Monaghan, now regarded Jonathan as the arbiter of their morbid destinies. He worked like a galley-slave, by day and by night, among strangers. His face grew more lined, his temples greyer. His tired mind suffered lapses that frightened Rachel. Now, more than ever, the responsibility of concentration fell on her.

"You really must take a holiday," she told him seriously.

"A holiday? My dear, whatever are you talking about? Do you realize that I've a visiting list of fifty-two this morning?"

Money rolled in. It accumulated in Jonathan's banking account; he wasn't even aware of it. All Wednesford was gorged with money, and lavished it in wild, fantastic spending: a golden age had dawned to crown the age of iron.

Then relief came. The wraith of Arthur Martock, finally invalided out of the army with malaria, returned from East Africa. His meeting with Jonathan was a glad one; for Jonathan was fonder of him than of any man he knew save only Harold. Their friendship, happily renewed, leavened the flat life of Wednesford. When the day's work was over, or seemed to be over, Martock would come along and smoke a quiet pipe in 'that devoted reconstruction of Eugene Dakers' study which Mrs. Dakers had transported from Chadshill; and there they would sit and talk of the good old times,

smiling at memories of those great open-air days when Mr. Dakers had taken them bicycling beyond Severn, recalling the odour of wild roses embalmed in the melody of Schubert's song, remembering, with a rapture that the passage of time made more poignant, the day of their boating-party at Arley, so scandalously terminated by Jonathan's recitation of *Comus*, and the extravagant night at Chadshill when the bailiffs were "in."

When Arthur Martock "dropped in" Mrs. Dakers emerged like a nymph in clinging draperies from the waters of Lethe; her manner brightened, her eyes sparkled; with a little persuasion she would doubtless have recited. She behaved as if Arthur's familiar presence had actually lured back the spirit of Mr. Dakers to his sublunary surroundings; the old, fixed smile came back to her lined face; her glance turned, for approval, toward the empty chair. The effect was startling, and a little ghostly.

In the sooty atmosphere of Wednesford, which is not encouraging to wild life—not even to that of a mosquito—Martock picked up steadily. The attacks of malaria that, when he first returned, would pounce on him with unexpected violence and shake his bones like a terrier killing rats, then plunge his quivering body into a fiery crucible, gradually became less frequent. He also noticed how tired Jonathan looked, and urged him to take a holiday.

"Miss Hammond and I can carry on quite well when you're away," he said.

"If I'm fit for a holiday, I'm fit for military service," Jonathan replied, illogically. He had determined, from the first, that as soon as Martock was able to deal with the medical needs of Wednesford, he would make another appeal to the Insurance Committee for his release. When Harold had sailed for Mudros he had consoled himself for his inactivity (as he chose to think of it) by imagining that his mother could not do without him; but that excuse held good no longer: for all the notice Mrs. Dakers took of him he might just as well have been in Salonika himself.

Eventually, he presented himself at Medical Headquarters in North Bromwich and asked for an examination that would establish his fitness to serve. The Deputy Director of Medical Services, a hoary Indian Army "dug-out," a male and senile version of Mrs. Perry, received him scornfully. He had no orders to examine Jonathan. However, as a personal favour. . . .

Jonathan stripped, and submitted himself to a grudging scrutiny. The colonel's methods were primitive and perfunctory. It was evident, from the first, that he had decided to put this impatient civilian in his place, if only for the sake of asserting his brief renewal of authority. He grunted and wheezed over Jonathan for five minutes, then turned him down.

"Flat feet," he said, laconically, "and your pulse is too fast."

"I walk ten miles a day, and could walk thirty,"

Jonathan protested. "Surely, if I'm not A 1, you can pass me as fit for Garrison Duty Abroad?"

"We've dozens of men," he was told, "who are fit for that. I gather you're a panel doctor with a large practice. The County Insurance Committee has first claim on you in that case. If you choose to apply to them," the colonel conceded, "I'll add my report. What did you say your name was?"

The colonel spelt it "Dacres." How flattered his father would have been! Jonathan thought.

He sent in another application for release. Within a week it was returned to him. The Committee regretted to say that he was indispensable.

"I told you," said Martock, "that you need a holiday. If *I'd* been examining you I should have turned you down in your present condition. For God's sake, man, be reasonable, and take a fortnight off."

Reluctantly Jonathan consented. Rachel was as delighted as if the holiday had been hers.

"You're not as indispensable as you think you are, Jonathan," she said. "Dr. Martock and I between us can deal with everything. Go off into Devonshire or somewhere, and take your mother with you."

She was overjoyed, in fact, by Jonathan's rejection; she knew that he had been fretting for long enough over his civilian status, and this official decree would set his mind at rest. The second part of her programme, however, did not materialize. Mrs. Dakers, having once been moved, was not to be moved again.

"My place is here," she declared with dignity, though why it was there, precisely, God only knew.

So Jonathan went alone. He set out on a lonely walking-tour through the sweet lands west of Severn; by Ludlow, with its chiming bells that seemed to meditate on happy, far-off things; through Bringewood Chase, the wood of the masque of *Comus*; past Lesswardine, the Delahay's family seat; over Clun Forest, to the head-waters of the Teme. Beauty enough was there, but sadness too: the sadness of a land incredibly old, a country mute and lonely, passive beneath the sorrow of war. From the upper Teme he crossed to the Wye valley, where, in Welsh Hay, the letters that Rachel had forwarded awaited him. Among them he found a wire from the War Office, informing him, as next of kin, that Major H. H. Dakers was on his way home from Salonika.

Instantly the atmosphere changed. The rest of his homeward journey was an ecstasy. Harold, his beloved Harold was out of danger! Each footstep now was lightened by memories of him in the old free days of their boyhood when they had trudged or cycled over these roads together. All through the valleys Harold's spirit kept him company. The tiredness that had dogged his paces left him. He returned to Wednesford bronzed with sun, full of fresh air and hope.

"What did I tell you?" Rachel greeted him proudly. "Why, anyone can see that you're another man."



Harold, alas! was another man also. Their first meeting in the Southern General Hospital at Bristol gave Jonathan a shock. The malaria of the Struma valley had wrecked Harold as completely as that of East Africa had shattered Arthur Martock. His year of service in the East had hardened him; he looked dry, pale, withered; his fine eyes shone from cavernous orbits; the line of his mouth was severe. He spoke brusquely, as a man accustomed to command. The charming, light-hearted boy whom Jonathan knew and adored had vanished for ever. A gaunt, hard-bitten man confronted him. Mrs. Dakers' "soldier son" had become a soldier indeed. But if all his old, gay self-reliance had gone, the strength that remained was of a sterner, soberer quality. This lean, grey, sinewy desiccation suited him. Wreck though he might be, he looked more handsome than ever.

"You needn't worry about the malaria," he told Jonathan. "I know all there is to be known about that. It's merely a question of time and a temperate climate. As a matter of fact—though, for God's sake, don't tell mother—my heart's a bit groggy. Nothing to speak of. I shall soon pick up when I get away from this hole. It's all right, I've put in for a transfer to another hospital."

"Where have you asked to go?" Jonathan innocently asked.

"I've applied for Stourford," Harold answered, perhaps too casually. "The Hingstons were always extra-

ordinarily decent to me. Besides, that'll bring me near to you and mother at Wednesford."

That was a kindly way of putting it at any rate. Was it deliberately, Jonathan wondered, that he had avoided mentioning Edie? Deliberate or no, this signal omission rose like a wall between them. From the moment that Harold had spoken of Stourford the glad and intimate atmosphere to which Jonathan had been looking forward ever since he received the wire from the War Office wilted and faded away into commonplace. To all intents and purposes the brothers were strangers; and though Jonathan assured himself that all the reservations were on his side and unreasonable, no effort of his could recapture the sense of complete understanding that he had anticipated in this meeting and, for a moment, known.

When, a fortnight later, Harold was transferred to Stourford, the situation grew no better. The Stourford car—petrol restrictions meant nothing to the Hingstons—brought Harold over to Wednesford. Mrs. Dakers, apparently indifferent as to whether he returned with his shield or on it, since either contingency might be dealt with according to established dramatic convention, received him with proud tears. It seemed unnatural to Jonathan that, even now, Harold made no reference to Edie; unnatural, and, to tell the truth, a little sinister. But Harold's whole attitude, that day, seemed strange; he lent himself unwillingly to Mrs. Dakers' dramatic ardours; he was distant, restless, and evidently anxious

to get the business over and return to the more congenial atmosphere of Stourford as soon as possible.

Harold's bored perfunctoriness ruffled Jonathan; he felt, not for his own sake but for his mother's, that Harold might really put himself out a little and take more trouble to play the game: but Harold, in Mrs. Dakers' eyes, was still, as always, above criticism. She took his boredom—if indeed she noticed it—for modesty becoming to a hero. Harold, the amateur, might act as clumsily as he liked provided that she, the professional, were allowed to play her part. This meeting, essentially, was her show, not his; and she made the most of it, to everyone's embarrassment, investing it with an Elizabethan quality which even Mr. Dakers would have approved. It was evident that she herself was satisfied with the production; for when Harold had hastily and awkwardly departed, she sat on, savouring the aftertaste of her histrionic emotion, with the ghost of the old, bland smile upon her lips. It seemed as if nothing could make her so unreal as contact with reality. "If only your father could have lived to see this day," she said. Meaning, of course, this performance.

After that first concession to filial duty Harold rarely condescended to visit Wednesford. He explained, by letter, that the Hingstons could not easily spare a car to bring him over, and that the railway journey, across country, was too awkward and tiring to be faced. To salve his conscience he consented to meet Mrs. Dakers

in North Bromwich, and actually escorted her to the theatre to see a Shakespeare play.

Nothing but the prospect of meeting Harold could have uprooted Mrs. Dakers from Wednesford. The rôle of a railway traveller was one which she had forgotten, and it took her five or six hours to dress for it. When finally, in her flowing black velvet, Jonathan drove her to the station and deposited her in the train, she looked like a mediæval martyr, a mature Joan of Arc, on her way to the stake. Apparently, however, she enjoyed the visit more than she had expected. She returned in triumph, scornful of the curious looks that her costume excited, and though the details of her experience were too sacred for Jonathan's ears, he gathered that Harold was now looking quite himself again, that his row of medal-ribbons had excited a lot of notice, and that the Shakespearean tradition in acting had departed for ever.

"I am almost thankful," she said, with a novel variation on the ancient theme, "that your dear father was spared the shock of listening to such a Juliet."

Whatever might be happening at Stourford, and Jonathan did not dare to imagine what was happening, it was evident that those luxurious surroundings suited Harold. Within six weeks of his transfer he wrote laconically to inform them that there was every prospect of the board from North Bromwich passing him fit for General Service. Anyway, he was determined to ask for that verdict. He didn't want to waste time over a home

appointment. As a matter of fact, his rapid promotion and his decorations had fired him with the idea of embracing a military career, in which war-service and honours would count heavily. As a regular officer in the Army Medical Corps he foresaw an easy and profitable life, with plenty of sport and a pension at the end of it. He didn't tell Jonathan this. The time of confidences between them was over. In any case poor old Jonathan was still expecting him to come into partnership in the Wednesford practice. That he should consent to such a fate was more than could be expected of any man in his senses; but, even though his plans were already cut and dried, there was no need to discuss them at present.

If the board passed him as fit, he wrote, he would be granted the usual three weeks' leave. He intended to spend them with a friend, a staff-captain in his brigade, who had been invalided with him, at his country place in Yorkshire. Jonathan would explain the situation to Mrs. Dakers, who would be sure to understand.

It was really too shabby! For Jonathan himself Harold's presence or absence made no great difference; since their meeting at Bristol the barrier between them seemed to have grown even higher and more impenetrable. Harold persisted in his obstinate refusal to mention Edie's name. Even the knowledge that he could tear himself away from Stourford to spend his leave with a brother officer was a mixed blessing; for, by suggesting that he was able to leave Edie lightly, it also

implied a cavalierness toward her that Jonathan, for some irrational cause, resented.

But Harold's disregard for Mrs. Dakers was quite another matter. He knew very well that his mother depended on him, lived for him, and that Jonathan would have to bear the weight of her disappointment. That he would have done willingly; he had already sustained Mrs. Dakers' romantic vagaries for more than twelve months. What worried him was that Harold could ruthlessly propose the infliction of this unnecessary pain. Heroes must be humoured, but this callousness was rather unheroic. For the first time in his life he wrote a letter of remonstrance, begging him, at least, to spend his last week in Wednesford.

Harold replied with a petulant postcard. If Jonathan really felt so intensely about it he might manage the last week-end. "I naturally want to make the most of my time," he wrote "and I think you might realize that Wednesford isn't much fun."

Jonathan, who had spent the whole of the war there, was in a position to realize it. Replying, he ventured to suggest that there were other things in life beside "fun." This letter went unanswered. Mrs. Dakers, its innocent subject, remained in the permanent conviction that Harold could do no wrong, and looked forward, blandly, to the ecstasy of having him to herself for three whole days, deputing to Jonathan, who was too busy to think of anything but work, all kinds of preparations for Harold's entertainment.

On the morning of the day when Harold should have joined them a telegram arrived: *So sorry cannot manage Wednesford. Called to London. Love. Harold.*

Jonathan had to break the news to Mrs. Dakers, who took it far more calmly than she had any right to do, splendidly rebuking Jonathan for his fury. She was perfectly satisfied, she said, that Harold must have good reasons for anything he did. Probably he had been called to the War Office. Nothing could be more natural than that the Higher Command should feel the need of his advice. "Our sacrifice," she declared, "is nothing compared with his."

Jonathan had his own opinions about Harold's capacity for sacrifice; as far as he knew, Harold had never made one in his life. He was furious, not for himself but for his mother. The telegram of excuse had been despatched from North Bromwich. Harold could easily have run over to see them if only for a couple of hours, and that "called to London," if he knew Harold, meant nothing but a sudden inclination to spend the last seventy-four hours of his leave in the traditional manner. That he actually did go to London was proved, if proof were needed, by an excessively charming letter, every word of which rang false, in which he consoled Mrs. Dakers for his defection. Apparently she was satisfied with it. Jonathan wasn't. Something had gone wrong with Harold. Or was it rather, that he, Jonathan, now found it impossible to accept Harold at his face value, as Mrs. Dakers did?

In either case, unfortunately, the result was the same. First Edie, now Harold: one by one the persons whom he had most adored in his life were slipping out of it.

Perhaps, after all, he was merely growing old; and age was accentuating, in some mysterious progression, the gulf which, as Edie had always insisted, separated his generation from Harold's and hers. With them the sense of obligations, the standards that governed his own life apparently had no more validity. They put it all down to the War. Since this outbreak of universal madness there were no more Absolutes. Everything, to these young people, was relative, provisional, uncertain. Their forced submission to one absorbing duty had absolved them from all others. It wasn't merely a question of age. All round him people much older than himself showed this convenient elasticity of behaviour. There must, he thought, be something morbidly rigid about himself. He was a living anachronism, still walking in the footprints of the Victorians; and walking alone. Not quite alone. There was Rachel. But he took Rachel for granted.

When next they heard from Harold he was in France and in the grip of authorities who knew nothing of his Macedonian reputation. There his White Eagle and his Military Cross counted for nothing. His "acting" Majority was lost. Within a week he found himself a Captain once more, attached, as medical officer, to a battalion of the Worcesters in which he knew no soul but one subaltern, young Steven Hingston, the son of



the Mrs. Wilburn whom he had known at Stourford.

At Salonika Harold had been something of a person. In France he was nobody. His brief and querulous letters filled Mrs. Dakers with indignation. It was scandalous, she thought, that her soldier son was not being appreciated; that he had dropped his Majority was a crying injustice. How could anyone expect England to win the war if first-class human material were treated like that?

"Your father," she said "would certainly have written to the papers about it."

Jonathan smiled grimly. In his new mood he wasn't at all certain that a little humiliation mightn't do Harold good.

## CHAPTER IV

### ONE GOES WEST

ONE spring evening, a couple of months after Harold's departure for the front, Jonathan came into the surgery at his usual hour and found that Rachel had not arrived. Something, he knew, must be wrong, for no soldier on parade was more punctual than she. As soon as his patients had been dealt with he told his mother not to wait supper for him and hurried to the Hammonds' new quarters in the Wolverbury Road. A light in the doctor's bedroom window confirmed his fears. He entered the house, without ringing, and went upstairs. Rachel, whose quick ears had heard the door close, met him on the landing.

"I knew you would understand," she whispered. "It was good of you to come so quickly, Jonathan."

"Another go of bronchitis?" he guessed at once.

"Yes, I'm afraid so. He says it's only a chill. But, all the same, I made him go to bed at once. This time he's quite submissive. That's what frightens me. He's such a fighter that when he gives in like this I hardly know what to make of it. Will you come and see him at once? I think he's expecting you."

Jonathan found old Hammond propped up on pillows; a faint flush overspread his frosty cheeks, his big hands clutched the bed-clothes as though his em-

barrassed muscles of respiration needed some additional purchase from which to act. He greeted Jonathan with a smile, but spoke with difficulty, catching his shallow breath between the words.

"A bit of a chill, huh? Must have picked up some damned infection somewhere. The same old business. Just like last time. Rather short of breath. Nothing to be done, Dakers. Perfectly plain-sailing. Did Rachel send for you? The girl must have lost her head. No reason to trouble you when you're busy. At this time of night."

The words, as Jonathan could see, were directed at Rachel rather than at himself. The old man was watching her closely, and when she turned aside to inspect the bronchitis-kettle that was standing on the hob, he signed to Jonathan to get rid of her. He did so, suggesting that she should go downstairs and prepare a poultice. As soon as she had disappeared, old Hammond's features relaxed; a look of relief and of exhaustion came into his eyes; his body slackened and collapsed against the pillows that propped him; within a few seconds he seemed to have aged twenty years. Then suddenly, in a rapid, toneless voice, he began to speak.

"No need to scare her," he said. "A good girl . . . a good girl. It's got me this time, Dakers, mark my words! No nonsense. Straight to the lungs. My number's up, and I know it. Huh?"

"Let's have a good look at you," said Jonathan,

with affected cheerfulness. The old man shook his head wearily: "No, don't disturb me. Leave me alone, Dakers; that's all that I want. No reason why I should make a nuisance of myself. And there's nothing that you could tell me that I don't know already. Just carry on to the end. It won't be long. I'm not a fool. Sooner or later it had to come. I know when I'm beaten."

But he made no resistance when Jonathan persisted in examining him, opening the front of his old-fashioned nightshirt with careful fingers, percussing and auscultating the ribbed and furrowed chest that heaved with a desperate automatic haste beneath his stethoscope. He lay there silent, with eyes closed, in a strange resigned calmness, as though his immortal spirit were already detached, and independent of the mortal struggle in which his labouring heart and diaphragm were engaged. When Jonathan had done with him he opened his eyes. There was something of the old challenge in them, and his blue lips smiled.

"What did I tell you?" he said. "Just waste of time! I know how my heart's behaving as well as you do. Just so far, and no further, huh? I'm not afraid. I've seen too much of death to be scared of it now. And, on the whole, I've had a good share of life. More than most men. A pretty full life, too. That's all that matters, when you come to the end of it. I'm quite contented. Just apart from Rachel. A good girl, Dakers, a good girl! I don't want her to suffer more than is necessary. Well, how long do you think?"

The eyes that he turned on Jonathan brooked no evasion.

He answered the direct question as well as he could:

"Your lungs are no worse than they were last time," he said.

"Last time? But that was different. I feel the difference. I'm tired, Dakers, I'm just tired to death."

"Of course, if you throw up the sponge like that, if you refuse to fight. . . ."

The old man shook his head: "There's no fight left in me. I've fought all my life. I'm tired of fighting."

Yet, even as he spoke, he became aware that Rachel had re-entered the room, and his voice, which on the last syllable, had faltered almost into silence, revived; his worn features brightened: "Ah, here she comes," he said almost gaily. "Good girl, good girl! It's just as I told you, Rachel. Dakers agrees." His forced smile challenged Jonathan to differ from him. "A touch of the old bronchitis. Nothing to worry about." With an effort, of which Jonathan realized the cost, he took his daughter's hand and patted it with his lean talons. "Yes, yes, that's nice and warm. Nothing like a linseed poultice! You see I shan't lack good nursing, Dakers, Huh?"

During the remaining moments of Jonathan's visit the old man kept up this attitude of cheerful, sceptical jocularly. Downstairs, in the dark sitting-room, Jonathan had to face Rachel's eyes. It wasn't easy. They

had inherited her father's faculty for compelling truth.

"Don't try to be kind to me, Jonathan," she begged him. "I'd much rather know the worst. I'm quite prepared for it."

"He's no worse than he was last time," Jonathan assured her truthfully.

"But that was different." She echoed the old man's words. "It's no use pretending that it wasn't different. I can feel it."

"And it's equally useless meeting trouble half way," he told her. "The treatment, in any case, is exactly the same. Stay near him, but don't worry him. You know what he is."

She knew what he was; but, this time, he was not what he had been. The quietness with which he submitted to her was so unlike him as to be sinister; his anxiety to save her trouble, to soften the loss which he knew to be impending, brought tears to her eyes. He was so gentle, so pitiful now, that she could not trust herself to look at him. Next morning, when Jonathan arrived, he could see at a glance that old Hammond was losing ground.

"For Rachel's sake," he suggested, "I feel it would be just as well to have another opinion. I think I'll bring Martock along this afternoon to have a look at you."

"What good can Martock do?" A momentary flash of the old spirit quickly died down. "Well, do what you like, Dakers. Do what you like."

"I know you can't suggest anything, but I want

you to make things as easy as possible for Miss Hammond," Jonathan warned Martock.

Martock nodded. "Of course. I quite understand." With Rachel he played up splendidly. "This case is straightforward. There's nothing to be done," he told her, "that Jonathan isn't doing."

"I know that already," she said. "He's been quite wonderful. But Jonathan is afraid of hurting me." She smiled at him wanly. "He needn't be, Dr. Martock, I'd much sooner know the truth. I rely on you to tell me. Is there any hope?"

"Hope? Well, there's always hope, if you put it that way."

"I see . . . I understand," she said. "Thank you for telling me."

"That girl is one in a million," Martock told Jonathan. "She's so extraordinarily quiet and composed that you don't, in the ordinary way, realize her enormous courage. Women of that kind are damnably rare in these days, Jonathan. Honestly I don't believe that you appreciate her."

"Don't I? I think I do. We've been friends for a good many years," Jonathan told him.

"I don't like seeing her alone there" Martock persisted. "It isn't fair to her. Of course, if the old man were an ordinary patient you'd get a nurse out from North Bromwich. The Hospital happens to be fairly empty just now. Why not have one of the sisters? Let's speak to Matron about it."

"He'd hate it," Jonathan told him. "I know him so well."

"Then why not hand over your work to me for a few days and settle in there yourself? I can carry on perfectly well for you. It won't be for long I'm afraid."

Jonathan thanked him. That, after all, seemed the best solution of the difficulty, for already the strain of day- and night-nursing was beginning to tell on Rachel. Abandoning his practice to Martock he established himself in the Hammonds' house. He, and Rachel, and the faithful John Morse, who, in this emergency, had shown himself capable of incredible patience and gentleness, took turns in watching at old Hammond's bedside.

The old man scarcely heeded them. If ever there were such a thing as euthanasia, his slow ending showed it. He lay for hours on end without speech, or any movement but the unconscious struggle for breath. He took their attentions, their presence, as a matter of course, submissively, almost unknowingly; his consciousness sinking slowly, softly, like a falling snowflake, into chasms out of which, each day, each hour, it was less easily reclaimable. Now he did not even ask them about the war, the progress of which had absorbed his interest to the exclusion of everything else. It did not matter to him that, as he lay there, the St. Quentin salient was being driven in. . . .

On the last night of all, when Jonathan was on



duty, the dim brain woke suddenly, as from a child's sleep, to cool and complete clarity. Jonathan was aware of the change before the old man spoke. It had the effect of sudden silence in a thunder-storm, of a burst of sunlight through skies heaped with cloud. For the first time in days the old man spoke without difficulty:

"Is that you, Dakers?"

"Yes, yes. Do you want anything?"

"Only to speak to you. While I've the chance. I think I'm going soon. Are you still there?"

"Yes, I'm here."

"It's about Rachel. She's a good girl. You realize that, Dakers?"

"Of course."

"She'll be quite alone. Nobody except the Higginses. That won't do. I think she's fond of you, Dakers. I know she's fond of you. She'd make a wonderful wife for any man, although I say it. . . ."

"She would. I quite agree with you."

"Ah . . . I'm glad to hear you say that. You know. . . . It would be a great comfort to me if I thought that you . . . and she. . . ."

There fell a silence in which Jonathan waited for the next word. He was deeply moved; tears gathered in his eyes. But no word came. As an encouragement he took the limp, bony hand that lay on the coverlet and pressed it. The fingers did not respond to his pressure. Breathing had ceased. It was finished, that proud old life; so brave, so weak; so foolish, so deeply wronged;

so fierce, so gentle; and, in the final reckoning, so full of generosity, of prejudice, of violence and of humanity.

Jonathan was nearly acquainted with death. In his daily commerce he had known it in many guises. Sometimes the spectacle had filled him with sheer pity, sometimes with thankfulness, as the salve for intolerable suffering. This quiet passing of the man with whom he had been so familiar, whose personality, vivid even in decadence, had coloured all his life at Wednesford, moved him in none of these ways. There could be nothing pitiful or tragic in an end that seemed so nearly kin to the serene finalities of nature, to the silence of sunset, the falling of a dead branch from an aged tree. The process was solemn, yet scarcely sorrowful. As he folded these bony hands and closed the eyes that had challenged life so fiercely, there was no sorrow in his heart; nothing but a vague disquietude for Rachel's sake.

The thought of Rachel need not have disquieted him. In the little living room, where she and Morse were sitting in silence, she received his announcement of the end without a tremor. As always in an emergency he found her supremely courageous. Perhaps it was not to be wondered at; but none the less her courage, tempered by long anticipation of the inevitable and steeled to meet it, brought tears of admiration into Jonathan's eyes. There were no tears in hers, and few words on her lips.

"You're sure he didn't suffer?" she asked him.

He shook his head. "I'm sure he died happily, Rachel."

"Poor dear! He deserved it. He was a good man, Jonathan. Perhaps nobody knows how good he was except we three. I want"—she hesitated—"I want to thank you both for all you have done for him . . . and for me. He would be as grateful as I am, and heaven knows I can never thank you enough."

"I think I'd better stay with you this evening," Jonathan said, seeking to cover the intensity of the moment by a return to practical exigencies.

"No, Jonathan," she answered with a faint smile. "It's very sweet of you; but really, if you don't mind, I'd rather be alone."

"Just as you wish," he muttered. "I'll send up a nurse from the Hospital to . . . to attend to things. And, of course, I'll come round myself, first thing in the morning."

"Will you?" she answered mechanically. "Yes, that's good of you."

She held out her hand to him. He took it and pressed it clumsily, then, feeling that further speech might betray the feelings of both of them, hurriedly made good his escape. John Morse, who also seemed thankful for the opportunity, went with him. They walked down the silent length of the Wolverbury Road together without speaking, yet Jonathan knew that both their minds were sore and oppressed by the thought

of Rachel's loneliness, searching in vain for something that might alleviate it. At the surgery door, as by consent, they stopped and stood for a moment in silence. It was evident that something was trembling for utterance on Morse's inarticulate lips, something that should be spoken if only it could find release. But nothing came, and so, to break the discomfort, Jonathan simply wished him good night.

"You've been a good friend to those two, if ever there was one, Morse," he said.

"Ay, a good friend," Morse repeated. "I'd lief have been more than a friend to one of them, though." He paused, as though this triumph of self-expression astounded him; then, realizing that the feat had actually been accomplished, he went on rapidly. "You know that I've been courting Rachel for near seven years?"

"I had no idea of it," Jonathan answered truthfully.

"Ay, seven year ago, come July, I first asked her to marry me. She's the only woman I ever set eyes on that'd do for me. Not anyone to touch her, in these parts, or anywhere else, I reckon. I've never given a thought to any other. I've worked for her, I've slaved for her, and that's how all the money's come along. I didn't want it for myself. No use to me without her. But, bit by bit, Dakers I've come to see I'm out of the running. She's fond of me; she's kind to me; I reckon she respects me like; but that's about the sum

of it. If I kept on asking her a hundred year she wouldn't have me now."

"Are you quite sure of that, Morse?" Jonathan asked.

"Sure? It's as plain as a poker. What's more, if you want the truth, I tried my luck again this evening. And she said 'no'."

"I'm sorry," Jonathan murmured. What could he say?

"Sorry? My God! you don't know what you're talking about! Sorry?" Morse clutched at the word.

"Haven't you the eyes to see that it's you she wants? Ever since you came here I knew my number was up. She hasn't said so. Of course she's too proud for that, and I like her the better for it. But, God, man, don't you realize the chance you're missing? A woman in a million! The best girl in the world! Left all alone, and only waiting for you to have the sense to take her! D'you think I'd speak like this if I weren't dead certain of it? I want her to be happy—nought else matters to me now—and you're her happiness, Dakers. Well, you're a man. I reckon that shows her sense. I've all the luck in everything else, but there my luck's dead out and yours is in. Don't think I grudge it you. . . ."

The spate of rough words ceased suddenly. Deprived of their impetus Morse relapsed into awkward commonplace. "I reckon I'd best be pushing on," he said. His calloused hand grasped Jonathan's and shook it firmly. "Good luck!" he added gruffly, and was gone.

That night, out of the long turmoil of his emotions, of pity, of admiration and of affection, Jonathan determined to ask Rachel Hammond to marry him. He was still awake when the solemn minor triad of Hingston's Steelworks saluted a tragic dawn.

## CHAPTER V

### EQUALITY OF SACRIFICE

A DAWN more tragic than Jonathan, in his new determination, had power to imagine. Four days before, the German Eighteenth Army had smashed through the British front at St. Quentin and hurled its fragments back on to the outskirts of Amiens. Apart from a vague consciousness of big events, nobody in busy Wednesford realized the import of what had happened, and Jonathan, absorbed in old Hammond's final illness, least of all. The name of St. Quentin, repeated on many lips, recalled to him the fact that Harold's battalion of the Worcesters, a unit in Gough's army, was posted somewhere in that neighbourhood; but two days after the catastrophe, and in the midst of the old man's swift decline, one of Harold's rare letters had arrived to assure them that he was safe and well.

On the afternoon that followed the evening of Hammond's death, a telegram was pushed into Jonathan's hand by one of the untidy little girls to whom they were entrusted in those days. He took it with a smile. It looked as if Harold, for once in a way, had been thoughtful of their anxieties. He opened it, read it, and then the world went black:

*Capt. H. H. Dakers . . . missing . . . believed  
killed.*

Killed? It was impossible that Harold should have been killed. Harold was too full of life, too intensely living for that. Impossible, too, that such a disaster should have happened without his feeling it. Four days ago? Why, there, on the surgery table, was Harold's last letter telling them that he was well. Another War-Office bungle; the mistake of a clumsy machine, grown too complicated for accuracy. Some other Dakers, perhaps? He stared at the telegram. Its words brooked no denial. Killed! But the qualification: *believed* killed? Thank heaven for that! Believed. Who had believed? He, at any rate, wouldn't believe it. Some soldier's story, haphazard, unreliable. A dozen instances of a like stupidity born of confusion leapt to his mind, mistakes of that kind were always being made. But "missing"? He couldn't easily get beyond that. Wherever he might be, Harold was not with his unit. Missing. . . . And the prospect of a shell-pitted wilderness, barbed-wire in tangles, splintered stumps of trees rose greyly before his eyes.

He rose unsteadily and wandered into the dispensary where Rachel, if death had only let her be, should have been waiting for him. As he stood there, lost, shattered, his mind refusing to act, that vision of war's desolation was replaced by another. He saw, of a sudden, his mother, sitting alone in her replica of the Chadshill study with an open book on her knees; on her lips, that bland, fixed smile; he saw her sitting there as he had seen her sitting for years, waiting, wait-



ing. . . . Even now she was waiting for him. It was his duty to take this news to her, as, once before, he had brought her the news of his father's death. He tried to pull himself together, but even as he struggled to compose his features he lost control of them. He knew that he couldn't possibly face her as he was.

Mechanically, with the flimsy telegram still fluttering in his hand, he found himself hurrying upstairs to his bedroom—the bedroom which he and Harold had shared during their first week-end at Wednesford. He flung himself on the bed, and lay as if stunned. Across the blank of his mind a hundred visions of Harold, a hundred ghosts passed in procession. Harold, the bright-haired child in his velvet suit; Harold, a slim, pale body, diving at Arley; Harold in his Cambridge blazer and cool white flannels; Harold so gay, so gallant in khaki, with his row of medal-ribbons shining. For Harold's beauty was always the beauty of life, of clean limbs in swift movement, gay looks, immortal laughter. Such beauty soared above the snares of destruction; immune, inviolable, indestructible. There was a rightness in the imagination that now made him always see Harold living, never Harold dead. A lie, a mistake! The most fantastic mistake.

Then arbitrarily, disconnectedly, he remembered his own last letter to Harold; the letter in which he had reproached him for neglecting to spend his leave with them at Wednesford. When he had written this, Jonathan had been rather proud of it; it was high time, he

had thought, that Harold should be pulled up sharp and told the truth about his selfishness. Those hard words were the last that had passed between them. In retrospect they took on an air of monstrous injustice. Harold had not deserved them; he had been misunderstood, misjudged. The letter, from first to last, had been unfair to him, unworthy of Jonathan. Harold had standards of his own, and should be judged by them. His behaviour had not been really callous, he had just been himself. And he, Jonathan, had spoiled this last memory by his officious petulance. Too late to correct it now; too late, too late! Overwhelmed by this trivial distorted memory, he broke into tears. The bed shuddered beneath the violence of muscular contractions that he could not control. A strange business. He had never behaved like this since he was a child.

He must have lain there for an hour or more in nescient misery. The first thing that recalled him to himself was the shrill challenge of the waiting-room bell. The evening consultation-hour had arrived. From that moment onward a steady flow of patients would silt up in the surgery. Rachel, of course, was still away, and could not put them off. However incapable of it he might feel, the duty had to be faced; that, and a duty even more pressing—his mother.

He tumbled off the bed and plunged his burning eyes into cold water. He found himself brushing his hair with an unusual care, as though, unconsciously, he were preparing for some ceremony. Everything that he

did that evening seemed governed by an automatic deliberation. Perhaps, though he did not know it, these delays were part of a subconscious attempt to temporize, to put off the evil moment which, every second, grew nearer and more inevitable. Finally, with as much volition as a swimmer whirled through a mill-race, he found himself swept into Mrs. Dakers' presence. He saw her exactly as his imagination had pictured her, sitting, with a book on her lap, in her accustomed chair. As he entered she raised her face and smiled, not at Jonathan but at life in general.

"I wondered where you were, Jonathan," she said with an impatience that had no connection with the smile. "The surgery bell's rung twice."

"I was upstairs, mother," he said: Then plunged. "I've had bad news."

"Bad news? What news?" said Mrs. Dakers unconcernedly.

"Harold, mother."

"Harold?" Her mouth was still smiling. "I hope," she said firmly, "it's nothing very serious."

Jonathan shook his head. He couldn't speak. He handed her the telegram.

"You know I can't read this without my glasses," she told him, petulantly. "Please read it for me."

Jonathan began to read. His voice cracked miserably. "Oh, mother, mother!" he cried. He fell to his knees beside her, and there, with his arms round her neck, he buried his grey head in her breast and conveyed to her,

disjointedly, the indefinite horrors that the telegram contained. He tried to comfort her by making it sound as indefinite as possible. Even the word "missing" he said, might be received with reservation. In the confusion of a big retreat officers often became separated from their units; were picked up, wounded maybe, and were dealt with by the clearing stations of other divisions. Possibly Harold was a prisoner; thousands of prisoners had been taken. A prisoner and unwounded; none could say. As for the second part of the telegram—that word "believed" was a cruel insult to their intelligence. "Believed" meant nothing; it was a term that shouldn't have been used. Probably, in a few days' time, they would hear from Harold himself. Why, they couldn't even be certain that the letter they had just received wasn't written after the time at which he was supposed to have been missing! It was just like old Harold not to date his letters. . . .

So Jonathan went on, gathering a certain inspiration from his own false reassurance. He went on, passionately, until he suddenly became aware of the fact that Mrs. Dakers wasn't listening; that all his urgency might just as well have been directed at a blank wall. As far as Mrs. Dakers was concerned, he simply didn't exist. The words that he poured into her ears had no more effect on her than those of a Salvation Army preacher in the next street. He realized, with a sudden shock, that he had been expounding his hopes and theories to a person who wasn't there.

Where was she? Heaven only knew! No other living soul had ever penetrated the Nirvana into which this strange woman had been uplifted on the day of her husband's death. The fears that had shattered Jonathan had no power to move her; she had no need of the consolation, the compensatory love which it was his passionate wish to give her. The creature whom he held in his arms, and on whose breast his grey head rested, was stony, remote, inhuman, as incapable of giving comfort as of receiving it.

When, at last, she did speak, her words had an effect of incredible bathos.

"This telegram," she said . . . "I refuse to believe one word of it. If anything had happened to Harold, I should *know* without being told. For goodness sake go into the surgery, Jonathan and put that bell off! It keeps on ringing and ringing. It's enough to get on anyone's nerves."

How Jonathan survived that evening's surgery or the work of the days that followed he never knew. Martock, who soon heard the news—all War-Office telegrams arriving in Wednesford were treated as public property—came round at once to give him condolences and substantiate his hopes. As a soldier, who knew how reports of casualties were made, he was able to insist on the wide margin of error. At that moment the confusion on the St. Quentin front must be simply monstrous. Such routine reports were provisional and often inaccurate.

He quoted cases to prove it. Everyone could quote

such cases. Already, according to later news, the shattered line was beginning to reform. In a week or two the undistorted truth, would begin to emerge. Meanwhile there was nothing to be done, unless Jonathan had any way of communicating privately with the War Office.

Jonathan remembered the Hingstons. Harold had been such a friend of the family at Stourford, and Sir Joseph, in those days, was credited with infinite, if mythical, powers. He rang up the Wolverbury works and spoke to the baronet, whose flat and uninspiring voice answered him with sympathetic pessimism. Of course he remembered Harold at Stourford; the fellow who played for Worcestershire. Dear, dear! How very sad! He couldn't promise to do much himself, everybody in the district nowadays over rated his influence. But when he had a moment to spare he would certainly get in touch with Lady Hingston, who knew everybody who counted for anything, and ask her to do what she could. He knew she'd be only too glad of the opportunity. Harold, he remembered, had always been a favourite of hers.

Jonathan left the telephone with a feeling of spurious elation. Something, at least, was being done; it took him an hour or two to realize how little. Meanwhile, since Mrs. Dakers appeared to be irritated rather than consoled by his presence, he sought relief and oblivion in the task of picking up the threads of his practice which, a few days before, he had handed over

to Martock. Even in that fury of work he found emotional pitfalls. By this time everybody in Wednesford had heard of his loss. Not only his own patients, but everybody whom he met seemed determined to express their sympathy toward him in words that shattered his self-control and brought new tears into his eyes. The whole atmosphere through which he moved was distressingly sympathetic. One might have imagined, now, that he had not an enemy in the world. Even George Higgins stopped him at the Foundry gates and wrung his hand. His tongue grew weary of repeating phrases of gratitude. They came to his lips mechanically; to him they meant nothing; he hoped that they conveyed more meaning to those who received them. And all the time he was asking himself why Harold should have died rather than he—Harold, whom all the world loved, rather than himself, who was loved by none.

In the meantime no further news good or evil arrived from Stourford to break this mood of hallucinated uncertainty which made his life as distressingly unreal as a bad dream. A dull, incessant ache falsified all other sensation, begetting a sort of spiritual paraesthesia; though he was still able to feel, the quality of his feeling was changed; so that, although he was aware of the pain that Rachel's parallel desolation inflicted on him, he was, at yet, unable to gauge its real effect on his mind. The fact that he failed to feel for her as acutely as was natural distressed him. It seemed wrong that she, whom he regarded with more tenderness—to

put it moderately—than any other living soul, should be deprived of his spirit's support in that dire moment.

He would have offered it willingly, and to the utmost, if he had been able; but it seemed as if he could not give her any part of himself. His self had simply ceased to function. His body, and that part of his mind which was concerned with the practice of his profession, remained unaffected; his muscles were able to work, his mind, in certain familiar channels, acted with its usual efficiency, and went on reacting reflexly, like the muscles of a vivisected reptile, part of whose brain has been exterminated; yet, as far as human relations were concerned, he remained, to all intents and purposes, a dead man, as incapable of emotion as old Hammond, whose huge coffin, supported by the shoulders of Jonathan, John Morse, and two of his favourite club-patients, was carried to the churchyard on the following afternoon.

Neither that mournful ceremony nor the inspired tenderness of the burial service, nor even the affecting loneliness of Rachel herself in her tragic black could stab his spirit into a renewal of its suspended consciousness. Not even Rachel's own condolences, could touch him. He was a ghostly changeling whose inward eye was haunted perpetually by visions, his mind by memories, of Harold. He only hoped, unhappily, that Rachel would understand. He believed that she did understand, and, as far as he was able, felt grateful for her comprehension.



When the funeral was over he hurried back, thankfully, to his work, refusing the aid that Martock generously offered him. He was almost glad to find that he was in arrears, that the business of making up for lost time and neglected duties would keep him absorbed and help the passage of time, which, people said, was heaven's most potent instrument of healing. All evening he toiled in the surgery, amid a flood of painful condolences, his labours beneficently extended by the absence of Rachel and the necessity not only of holding consultations but of dispensing. All evening the stream of patients flowed unceasingly. It was past nine o'clock when the waiting room door closed behind the last of them. He locked the door; then sighed, and sat down at his table, staring in front of him. The aching weight of his loneliness slowly returned.

A knock at the door, a welcome summons, aroused him. He left his table and opened it, seeing, in the dimness of the brick passage, a woman's figure.

"Come in. Who it is?" he said.

"It's I, Jonathan." The voice that answered him was one which, at any other moment of his life would have set him on fire.

"Eddie? You? What are you doing here? Come in," he repeated.

She entered and took his hand without a word; gazed silently, piteously into his miserable eyes. The fineness of her pallid face had never seemed more beautiful than at that moment; but her eyes were as

full of suffering as his own, her lovely mouth drawn tight.

"Oh, Jonathan, Jonathan," she said, and was sobbing against him.

"Edie, my darling," he murmured. The words meant nothing, and almost nothing that sweet body, which he worshipped, surrendered to his embrace. If this had happened only a week before! His dead soul was awakened by the shock of this piercing joy sufficiently to appreciate at least its irony; and the fact that he could now feel anything at all filled him with bewilderment.

For a long time, it seemed, she continued to sob in his arms. Then, suddenly, raising a calm and harrowed face, she left him and moved, with a strange deliberation, toward his desk. He followed her. She took his chair and faced him, tragically, the surgery table between them. When next she spoke it was with an almost uncanny composure.

"I had to come and see you, Jonathan," she said. "The day before yesterday Sir Joseph telephoned and told Lady Hingston. It very nearly killed me, Jonathan." Remembering it, her face reflected that moment of agony. "I wish it *had* killed me," she added passionately "Jonathan, I suppose you knew?"

"Knew? What do you mean, Edie? I don't understand." But he did understand.

"About Harold and me," she answered simply. "That we loved one another."

"No, I knew nothing . . . for certain," he replied, with a tranquillity that surprised him. "Harold never told me."

"I expect he wanted to spare you, Jonathan. He knew you had been . . . fond of me. Of course I had told him all about that long ago. He was dreadfully sorry. He loved you too. A great deal."

Jonathan shook his head. Again words failed him. But Edie, composed and dry-eyed, went on speaking. Her voice, that had been hard and toneless, took on a strange tenderness.

"It's a long story, Jonathan. Too long to tell you now. I suppose I've always loved Harold. Years and years. Ever since I was a kid. Why, I can tell you when exactly; that night at Silver Street when we danced together. There was a moon. Do you remember it?"

Remember it! That night, above all others, still haunted his memory. He remembered also that once before she had spoken of it—on the day of their walk over Uffdown—how many years ago!

"That was when I loved him first," she was saying. "It made me fearfully shy; I was just a schoolgirl; I didn't really know a bit what it meant. But how I envied Sheila, for dancing with him! I expect you've forgotten. Then later, one day. Oh—a long time afterwards. I'd just gone to Marbourne, and you were there too, Jonathan, I remember. We'd all gone to watch them playing for Cambridge at Alvaston. Harold made sixty-six. We were fearfully proud of him! When he

got out, he came and sat down by me, and you went off in a hurry. I could see he was rather jealous of Sheila and George Delahay. I think it was that that made me know how I loved him. A crystallization . . . is that what Stendhal calls it? Anyway, from that moment I realized that I could never love anyone else. Your father died, Jonathan, and after that neither of you ever came near us. That was why I wrote to you and made you meet me. Even when we went for walks together, Jonathan, I was thinking of him. Can you ever forgive me, Jonathan? I used to try and make you talk about him. All the time I kept looking for reminders of Harold in you. Harold. . . . That must sound funny. . . . You called him Hal, didn't you?

"It was just the same, again, when I went to Sweden. I had a sort of love-affair there; his name was Sten Engestrom. I only went mad with him because his eyes looked like Harold's. It's curious, isn't it? And then, during the war, when Harold was stationed in North Bromwich, he began to notice me. We danced and went out together quite a lot. It didn't seem much to him then, I know; but when he went off to Salonika he began to think about me, while I, of course, was thinking of nobody but him. And when he was invalided home again he managed to get sent to Stourford simply because he knew I was there. Oh, Jonathan, it was wonderful! Harold was such a poor darling, and I'd been waiting for him so long! Of course, when we met at Stourford we became quite hopeless. Not even I

had guessed how bad it was. Those days, when he was convalescent, were the happiest, the most wonderful in all our lives I suppose.

"Of course, being in hospital, we had to be awfully careful. Lady Hingston's a vulgar old dear, but fearfully strict about rules and that sort of thing. If we'd been properly engaged, either Harold or I would have had to leave Stourford, and time was so short we simply couldn't face that. Harold wanted to marry me, you know. But I wouldn't. I didn't want to. God knows why. You'd laugh at me if I told you I was shy, wondering what the people at Silver Street would think. You know what dreadful snobs we are; they might have been beastly . . . to Harold, you know.

"And then," she paused: "and then there was something else. It's difficult to explain. You'll think I'm a fool. You see, Jonathan . . . you see we were so marvellously happy as we were, and I had a feeling—I can't explain it—I had a feeling that marriage, somehow, would spoil it. I'd waited so long for so little. That bit of happiness—I was so jealous of it. It seemed to me actually dangerous to take the risk of bringing it down to what ordinary people were doing: the wounded soldier marrying his masseuse, a week of honeymoon, and then off to the front again. Besides, I'd seen so many war-marriages of that kind going wrong, I don't know. . . .

"Of course it was all my fault. Harold implored me to marry him. The darling was just as conventional as

you are, Jonathan. And of course he was right. But I am not conventional. I've always had what people call 'advanced' ideas. I've always thought of love as something quite separate from marriage. So had Harold, in theory; we'd often talked of it. But not in my case. He tried his very hardest to make me marry him on the first day of his leave. For my stupid sake he would have kept it quite secret; nobody in the world need have known except, perhaps, you. But, somehow or other, I couldn't bring myself to it. I couldn't face losing—how can I put it?—the bloom of our love. All the books I'd read, particularly in Sweden and Germany; such a swarm of theories buzzing in my bonnet.

"Then his leave came. Naturally, he had to go away from Stourford. I wanted him to stay somewhere near, so that we could still see each other. I wanted him to come to Wednesford, partly for your sake. Of course that would have been difficult. I was working single-handed at Stourford, and that meant that I could only snatch an hour now and then. Harold said he simply couldn't stick it; 'so near and yet so far'—that sort of thing. He was so tragic about it that I'd have done anything; I'd even have married him; but then it was too late; we'd put it off so long that we'd made a mess of the whole business.

"He absolutely refused to stay near Stourford. He said he'd rather be a hundred miles away. We were both of us so fearfully unhappy about it that we had a sort of quarrel—the only one we ever had in our lives.

He said that if he couldn't have me altogether he'd rather go and stay with that friend of his in Yorkshire; and I said if he felt like that he'd better do it. It was all my fault, Jonathan, every bit of it!

"So, when his board was over, he dashed off to Yorkshire. You know all about that—no, not quite all. You don't know, you've no idea, how ghastly it was for both of us. He wrote to me every day; he was utterly miserable; and I, of course, felt the same; I knew that I'd used him badly. It was dreadful to realize that, and know, at the same time, how much the poor darling loved me. Then, when he was up in Yorkshire, he got his new orders for France, and that put the lid on. I felt that we'd missed our chance, out of pure stupidity. I felt that he'd go out to France and get killed; that all our love would be ended without our ever having known the best of it; I felt that, somehow or other, I'd got to put it right, to play fair with him. Oh, Jonathan, can you imagine how wretched I was? You can't. You've never been as much in love as we were.

"Of course you remember he'd arranged to spend the last week-end of his leave with you at Wednesford? He'd written to me telling me the time his train would arrive at North Bromwich. We were going to spend the last afternoon together before he went on to you. A couple of hours, that was all it would have been.

"When I realized that, I made up my mind quite quickly. I went to Lady Hingston and arranged to get three days off. I told her a story—quite true as it

happened—about Alec being on leave. When Harold got to North Bromwich I was waiting on the platform with all my luggage ready; just one suitcase. We had only five minutes in which to settle everything. I told him how sorry I was; how silly I'd been. I asked him to take me on with him—the same train, you know—to London. At first he had all sorts of scruples, my honour and that sort of thing. As if I cared for that! I wanted nothing but him. He was quite bewildered, poor dear! Then, when he realized that I was absolutely in earnest; he gave way; we both of us knew, in the bottom of our hearts, that we were doing right. Really the only thing that worried him was the thought of disappointing you and his mother. We managed to scribble a telegram and gave it to a porter just as the train was moving out. I hope he sent it all right?"

"Yes, yes, the telegram arrived."

"And, of course, you were disappointed! I'm sorry, Jonathan. No, I'm not sorry. However fond you were of him, Harold was really mine. We belonged to each other. It was our only chance. Thank God, thank God, we took it!"

She closed her eyes, with a sigh that was like a shudder, and went on speaking in a slow, level voice.

"We had three days in London, Jonathan. Three days of Heaven: I only live to think of them. We were like a couple of kids, Jonathan; just like children. They



went so quickly. On the Monday night I saw him off on the boat-train. Oh, my God, my God!"

"Edie!" he cried. But the moment of agonized memory had passed. She even smiled:

"No, Jonathan dear, I'm quite all right," she said. "I'm all right now. Don't worry. Three marvellous days . . . the best of my life . . . all of my life that matters. I shall never regret them. If Harold had gone away like that, if we'd never. . . ."

She paused; and when next she spoke it was with a strange, a devastating matter-of-factness.

"It wasn't only to tell you that that I came here, Jonathan," she said "I came to consult you, partly because you're my friend and Harold's brother, and partly"—her voice sank suddenly—"because you're a doctor. I think," she went on, "that I'm going to have a child, I want you to tell me for certain."

Once more, for the second time in four days, the world went black for Jonathan. There was nothing fixed in it but Edie's face, so strangely composed, her level voice. Her eyes met his firmly: there was even in them a shade of pitiful amusement at his distress.

"Just try to forget who I am, Jonathan dear," she was saying. "Just try to treat me as if I were an ordinary patient, a stranger, asking for your advice. You mustn't be shy of"—she hesitated—"of this poor, abandoned woman, Jonathan."

"Edie, you must be patient with me," he said. "This is too dreadful."

"No, no," she answered. "You mustn't think of it like that, Jonathan. It isn't dreadful at all. . . . To me, I mean. What do you want me to do?"

"Will you come over here, Edie?"

"Of course. And what next?" She smiled faintly; the old words came to her lips, half loving, half mocking: "Oh, Jonathan, Jonathan!"

He tried to imagine that she was, indeed, just a patient; to think of that loveliness, which to him was all beauty, as nothing but human flesh, the object of his skill, the material of his clinical judgment. When once the first horror had passed, that was what it became. His doctor's mind worked coldly, automatically; his hands were the instruments of a detached and scientific brain. When it was over, she rose and faced him with the same brave smile.

"Thank you," she said, quite simply. "Was I right, Jonathan?"

"Yes, you were right," he told her. "I think there's no doubt."

For a moment she stood silent, with distant eyes. Then, slowly she passed her hand across her brow.

"I suppose I'm glad," she said. "You see . . . I shan't lose him entirely. Does it hurt you terribly, Jonathan? Oh, I'm so sorry. But who could I have come to, if not to you?"

The question, though Jonathan heard it, meant nothing to him. As she spoke, one thought above all others asserted its pre-eminence in his mind. His

numbed brain was still struggling to put it into words. At last he turned his tragic face toward her.

"Eddie," he said, "for Hal's sake and the baby's as well as your own, I want you to marry me. At once. The sooner the better."

"Oh, Jonathan, Jonathan," was all that she could say.

## CHAPTER VI

MRS. JONATHAN DAKERS

EVERYONE in Wednesford was delighted with Jonathan's marriage. Time and the trend of events had combined to deal kindly with his reputation. Of all the figures which had filled the Wednesford medical scene when first he stepped upon it, ten years before, not one now remained but himself. Craig was still comfortably established at Aldershot; Monaghan, less comfortably perhaps, in Alexandria; old Hammond was dead, Lucas had become a ship's surgeon. All Wednesford, in a medical sense, now rested in the hands of Arthur Martock and Jonathan, and seemed, on the whole, contented with its lot; for patients, as Craig justly complained, have fickle memories, and that which establishes a doctor's reputation is not so much his skill as the confidence that comes from familiarity with his presence.

So Craig, in an access of simulated indignation, might complain that Jonathan, by shirking military service, had stolen his patients, neglecting to mention the fact that the money which Jonathan received from them was scrupulously handed over to him; but now, in the fourth year of the war, indignations of that kind were apt to fall flat, the wearing of khaki had ceased to appear romantic, and those who wore it—particu-

larly those who wore it at home—could no longer claim exceptional consideration. Moreover, those of Craig's patients who now relied on Jonathan were, fortunately, civilians; and not even the most military-minded among them could share Craig's condemnation of Jonathan's position without condemning themselves. The "equality of service" business had been overdone; khaki displayed, rather than covered, a multitude of sins; and Jonathan, after all, was just one of themselves; they could talk to him on equal terms, without the feeling of inferiority which Craig inflicted.

In any case, apart from this waning of enthusiasm for things military as such, his years of devoted practice in Wednesford had strengthened Jonathan's position. The Hospital, that bitter cause of contention, was functioning smoothly and efficiently; its finances, helped by the war boom, were now firmly established; the absorption of the North Bromwich hospitals into the military machine had compelled Jonathan to handle spectacular surgical cases locally. With Martock's skilled and willing aid he had been able to develop his surgical bent; the two friends worked together, playing into each other's hands, and even the most prejudiced members of the committee were forced to realize that Jonathan's patients didn't, as Craig had suggested, invariably die; that his percentage of successes was as high as or even higher than Craig's. For technical advice they now relied on him, as once they had relied on Craig. They were able to boast to their

subscribers that the Hospital was a real success, and, naturally, took the credit to themselves. Fighting, as a form of amusement, had gone out of fashion; the absence of turbulent medical factiousness was a positive relief; and while they congratulated themselves on it, they knew that they owed it to Jonathan.

Not only in his professional position had time and war brought changes. Their influence seemed to have modified his exterior to suit his new status. Though still under forty, he now had the appearance of a middle-aged man. That light-hearted, ungainly youth, whose advent Wednesford had regarded so doubtfully ten years before no longer existed. In his stead was seen a burly, hard-bitten man, grey-haired, composed and rugged of feature, with nothing of youth about him but eyes in which shone, at unexpected moments, the old gay, humorous challenge. Some years before, Edie had told him, half-mockingly, that he was growing handsomer. In one sense it was true, but the handsomeness was one of strength, rather than of grace. This later Jonathan gave, above all else, the impression of power, reserved and unexerted; he commanded confidence rather than admiration. Quite apart from his reputation strangers felt they were safe in his hands.

For some time now, the faithless Mrs. Perry had accepted him. "I have never known a young man improve so enormously in such a short time," she declared. The improvement was so great that it absolved him, as formerly it had absolved Craig, from the duty

of "supporting" the church to a greater extent than that of attending Mrs. Perry free of charge. Prompted by bitter memories, Jonathan had discovered the secret cause of her dyspepsia in the delicious tea that her cousin sent her from Dharjeeling, and had sweetened Mrs. Perry's stomach and her temper simultaneously by forbidding its use.

"I must admit," she said, at a time when some sacrifice was still implied by the admission, "that in spite of other things, Dr. Dakers is extremely clever." By "other things" she meant, no doubt, his social qualifications; and the news of his marriage to Edie removed even these. "The young Mrs. Dakers," she told everybody, "belongs to a most distinguished family. I happen to know that she is a cousin of Lord Clun's. Of course things like titles have very little weight with us nowadays. The war, I'm glad to say, has strengthened our sense of Christian brotherhood. Still, Mrs. Gaige, it is a comfort to have a woman of good family in the district. Since poor George Hingston was killed and dear Eleanor left us" (the use of their Christian names was now safe and impressive) "we have felt the need of people of our own class. This marriage is a sign of this democratic age. Much as I respect Dr. Dakers, I must confess I often wonder how dear Lady Clun regards it."

The Marchioness, to be precise, regarded it to the exact extent of a silver toast-rack, evoked, out of compliment to Mr. Martyn (who was no more her

cousin than Mrs. Perry herself) by the announcement of Edie's wedding in the *Morning Post*. But Mrs. Perry, together with Mrs. Gaige and Mrs. Clarke at second-hand, were none the less impressed. The first, as the only local representative of the ruling class, hurried to call on Edie at the first possible moment, and talked to her for an hour on end with a fluency that brooked no explanatory interruption, about the Cluns, the whole Powys family, and nothing but the Cluns. As a concession to their reflected glory she even went so far as to unbend to Jonathan's mother.

"A little bird has whispered to me, Mrs. Dakers," she said, "that you recite divinely! I am afraid you have been hiding your light under a bushel. That's very naughty of you, you know. We shall have to get over your modesty, when next we arrange a concert for our beloved Hospital. Isn't that so, Mrs. Jonathan?" she added, playfully to Edie.

To Jonathan himself, in her husband's absence, she had written a letter of congratulation and good wishes in the Rector's best pulpit manner, hoping not only that he and Edie might fully realize to the full the solemn joys of Holy Matrimony (as she and Mr. Perry doubtless knew them) but also that God, of his Mysterious Mercy, would Bless their Union.

Life, in those days, was full of minor ironies amenable to no correction save that of a lively sense of humour: as when Mrs. Gaige, calling on Edie, assured her that she had always looked upon Jonathan as a son.



"There *was* a time," she whispered, "when our Dolly . . . " And she shook her head with a knowingness full of unutterable implications.

"*Was* there a time, Jonathan dear, when their Dolly . . . ?" Edie asked.

With little private jokes of that kind, in the invention of which Edie displayed a virtuosity for which Jonathan was thankful, they managed, superficially at any rate, to smother the realities of the tragicomical situation which everybody in Wednesford except themselves regarded as a romantic and happy marriage. Everybody, rather, except themselves and Mrs. Dakers, whose reactions were of the extreme illogicality which might have been expected of her. Not only had she originally refused to accept the War Office account of Harold's casualty, but later, when the confusion of the St. Quentin reverse had cleared up, and the personal reports on which the official belief in his death were based became available, she persisted in regarding these as evidence confirming his survival.

A sergeant of the Worcesters shell-shocked, wounded and in hospital at North Bromwich, had been close to Captain Dakers at the moment when he and six others had been buried by a shell-burst. He could take his oath that all the rest of them had "gone west." Jonathan interviewed him in North Bromwich, and was convinced that the man was speaking the truth. Mrs. Dakers, on the other hand, maintained that since the poor fellow had been shell-shocked he was unreliable

as a witness. She stuck to her guns, declaring that if Harold had really been killed she would certainly have known it, and made the visitors who came to condole with her look foolish by treating their object contemptuously and themselves with a haughty and embarrassing aloofness. She went even further than that. For the first time since Mr. Dakers' death, ten years before, she deliberately abandoned her mourning attire, replacing it by garments, in the same voluminous design, of a brilliantly-coloured and large patterned cretonne, which gave to her seated figure the aspect of an easy chair upholstered with a loose cover, and invited one, as Edie mischievously suggested, to sit down on her.

The renewal of activity to which disaster had aroused Mrs. Dakers showed itself in other ways. Up till then she had borne her transference to Wednesford with a grudging passivity; her life, as everyone should know, was buried with Mr. Dakers at Halesby; her spirit had neither part nor lot in the life that surrounded her. But now there was nothing passive about her; she became interested in everything and everybody; was only waiting, in fact, for Mrs. Perry's invitation to recite.

In this state Jonathan's sudden marriage spurred her to an access of malignancy. Not that she had any personal objection to Edie—on the contrary, it seemed to her incredible that Edie should have thrown herself away on Jonathan, whose treatment of his own mother, as exemplified by her monstrous uprooting from Chads-hill, showed clearly how badly he habitually behaved

towards women. In every way Jonathan had acted abominably; all Mr. Dakers' sensibility had been inherited by Harold; Harold, she said, would never have dreamed of marrying at the moment when Jonathan was missing—at this point the theme became very involved—and even if Harold were *not* missing, as she preferred to believe, was it not typically insensitive and thoughtless of Jonathan to have uprooted her wilfully from Chadshill a few weeks (Mrs. Dakers was always rather vague about time) before introducing another mistress into the Wednesford house? He had dragged her there, she declared, on false pretences; her heart was in Chadshill, her heart was not there. What, in short (or rather at inconceivable length) was Jonathan going to do about it?

For the moment, luckily, the necessity of doing anything did not arise. There was nothing in Edie's present condition to prevent her carrying on her patriotic work at Stourford; dozens of newly-married women in those days were doing the same, and though, perhaps, some idle minds might find it suspicious that she and Jonathan had married only to separate, others might consider her devotion to duty admirable. In any case both of them were thankful for this separation; there were times when their joint sense of humour could hardly be stretched to cover the innocent ironies which were continually being thrust upon them; and, quite apart from the awkwardnesses that Mrs. Dakers' injured dignity created, the delicacy of their own private relationship

was hard enough to deal with, and the task of passing it off in public as a state of radiant married happiness well nigh impossible.

Even Jonathan's love for Edie, that mystical, sacramental emotion, had suffered a shock in discovering not only that she had loved Harold passionately but also that she was to be the mother of Harold's child. Its fervour had been based, however unreasonably, on hope; and now that hope had been extinguished, once and for all, there seemed to be little left. He loved her still; now that Harold was gone he loved her more dearly than anyone on earth; but the character of his love had changed, the physical part of it, which had probably been the strongest, being subtly repelled by the fact that she was not and could never be wholly his.

In niceties of that kind his reactions were far more sensitive than Harold's. The quality in Edie which had most enthralled him was her intangible virginity. Now, if she were no longer, in a legal sense, intangible, she was also no longer virgin. The Tanagra Artemis had slipped from her pedestal. Perhaps, with the passage of time, the effects of this lapse might wear themselves out and allow his delicate spiritual mechanism to re-adjust itself. For the present, however, as a factor transcending equally those instinctive reservations which complicated their private life and the falseness of their position in public, there remained, as a bond and as a barrier between them, the abysmal misery and emptiness which each felt in Harold's loss.

Edie was the braver of the two. The gallantry which had brought her, composed and dry-eyed, to Jonathan's surgery on that ghastly evening, still sustained her. Whether at Stourford or Wednesford, her beauty still kept the pure and gemlike brightness of an intaglio. Perhaps, as once she had confessed to him, she was sustained by the consolation of feeling that, for her at least, some part of Harold remained. But that, alas, held little consolation for Jonathan. His heart was empty, desolate, and vexed by bitterness, not against Harold who had actually robbed him of his happiness, but against the unassailable fate that had robbed him of Harold.

It was this grief, deep-rooted and inconsolable, rather than the predestinate frustration of his passion for Edie, that made Jonathan, in those days, look so worn, so old. There was an ironical fitness in the calamity which, at one blow, and at the very zenith of the material success for which he had striven so long, had robbed him of the two dearest treasures of his heart. The bewildering suddenness of the blow was, possibly, merciful. It left him moving about his routine work in Wednesford like a ghost revisiting the scenes of his earthly life, performing his duties mechanically, unreasoningly, or in obedience to the dictates of some reason that was no part of himself.

He was terribly lonely too. Of course he was used to loneliness. Apart from his convivial student days in North Bromwich his life, on the whole, had been

reserved and self-contained, finding support, when it was needed, in the human contacts and relationship of his practice. But now he hungered for human intercourse of another kind, and went unsatisfied. Edie, who he knew would willingly have given it, was miles away at Stourford; the strange, fantastic mind of Mrs. Dakers was not only closed to him, as always, but actually and perversely hostile; Martock, for all the goodwill and loyalty in the world, was powerless to help him; for the life which they had shared together seemed too remote, too troubled; its memories, by contrast, were too bitter to aid him now. The only person who could have given him real solace was Rachel; and his present relationship with Rachel was queerer and more difficult than any other.

Rachel was on his conscience. He couldn't forget that, but for this tremendous accident, he would have asked her to marry him; and though—Heaven be thanked!—he hadn't given any inkling of his intention to her or even to John Morse, his sudden change of direction, however chivalrous its motives, had put him in the wrong.

The fact that, on that very evening, she had refused John Morse's offer and the reasons that Morse had given for her refusal suggested further complications. Was it possible, he asked himself, that old Hammond had communicated his last wish to her as well as to himself? Was it in definite expectation of his proposal that she had rejected Morse's? These questions could not be answered without her help, and quite

apart from the offence to her pride and delicacy which the asking involved, their relationship had lost so much of its former intimacy that it would now be impossible even to approach the subject.

Whether Rachel had realized his intentions or no, it was certain that his sudden marriage to Edie had come as a shock to her. The moment in which she offered him her congratulations had been intolerable to both of them. She had given them with a directness, a whole-heartedness that were disarming; he knew that she meant what she said unreservedly. Yet, even while her generosity overwhelmed him, he realized that her congratulations had more discernment in them than any others that he received; she knew him so much better than anyone else; her dark eyes probed the depths of his distress, and, while she wished him happiness, saw that he was not happy. She pitied him, and Jonathan was aware of her pity—so acutely aware of it, and, indeed, touched by it, that, if his secret had been his own, he might easily have shared it with her, and found comfort for his loneliness; but loyalty to Edie on her side, and to Harold's memory on his, sealed both their lips.

Gently, compassionately Rachel withdrew herself from the intimacy which might have meant so much to him; and though, in the conduct of the practice, they worked together as usual, their relationship, which had once been so familiar, became formal on her side and awkwardly restrained on his; so that when, a little later, Jonathan met her in the High Street talking with John

Morse and saw her blush when he saluted them, he almost felt as if the weight of a responsibility had been lifted from his mind.

Repelled by the unabated grievances of Mrs. Dakers and further isolated by Rachel's tactful withdrawal, Jonathan sought solace, of a sort, with his old mistress, Philosophy. In that remote and exalted communion he found refuge. The *Enneads* of Plotinus satisfied those mystical cravings which, now that the sensuous appeal of poetry no longer moved him, seemed to be the principal hunger of his soul. In his new loneliness, when all things human, including his own passionate humanity, had failed him, when beauty had power to wound, and even the face of nature saddened with admonitions of waste and mortality, he felt, for the first time in his life, the urgent need of some power, some presence outside himself. So far his own strength, the sheer ardour of living had sufficed him. Now, when all his material desires had been granted him, when, as it seemed to outward eyes, the heat of the struggle was ended, he felt himself weak, lifeless, defeated; driven, with the herd of humanity, to seek some God.

He found one—not Mrs. Perry's Jehovah: the God of Battles, alas, was too familiar!—in the nebulous upper regions of Neoplatonism. Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus became the companions of his thought. Not only in their dynamic pantheism did his soul find the detachment that it craved; there was something eminently satisfying to its frustrated desires in the



asceticism that this cult demanded. The origin and the blame of evil lay in the desires of the soul. That which his soul desired, yet could never attain, had been evil. Hence his suffering, and thence the way to salvation. By this means, in secret, the mind of Jonathan passed into a strange, unearthly calm, a sort of sublime, hallucinated anaesthesia. And Rachel, who loved him, watched this translation with wonder, and not without pain.

## CHAPTER VII

### PROVIDENCE INTERVENING

At the week-ends, when for the sake of appearances, Edie came over to Wednesford, this secret life of Jonathan's was abandoned. Then practical, human considerations forced him to put on a protective colouring which everyone, except Edie, imagined to be that of his real self. Her courage, which might easily have been mistaken for insensitiveness, her brave cheerfulness, demanded an equal return; and Jonathan, who in spite of being his mother's son was no actor, felt the strain of it.

Even if he could no longer reverence Edie's virtue, as once he had done, he still admired and respected her virtuosity. Meeting her, as she stepped out on to the platform at Wednesford on a Saturday afternoon, he could see no superficial difference between her and the Edie for whom he had waited so ardently at Wychbury.

Her beauty was as untarnished, its clarity as crystalline as ever; indeed, he might even have admitted that suffering had added to her loveliness a composure which enhanced it. There was no reservation in the smile that brightened her face when first she caught sight of him; when she put up her face to his to be kissed the gesture had more significance, if less spontaneity, than on that

memorable day at Wychbury. Her attitude toward him was freer; her comradeship, based upon the sad secret they shared, more frank than ever before. They would walk away from the station arm in arm, recounting to each other the news of all that had happened since last they met; and people who watched them pass would salute them with the smile that the world owes to the happiness of married lovers.

Even when they were alone together they adopted a tacit convention which disregarded the truth of their position. With an adaptability which amazed him, Edie deliberately immersed herself in the interests of Jonathan's unexciting life, the details of his medical work, his relations with his patients. Her anxiety to identify herself with all these everyday activities, to keep their life suspended, however perilously, on this unemotional plane, revealed to him a new and astonishing aspect of her nature. Her mind was as clear-cut and nicely poised as her lovely head; its workings were so practical, its judgments so realistic that, beside them, the mental processes of Jonathan seemed nebulous and sentimental; while over and above this fine intelligence, there played, like gleams of summer lightning, the old, elfish, humour, revealing and dazzling at once.

She possessed, indeed, more than Jonathan had ever realized, that instinctive tact which is the highest product of good breeding; and nowhere was this displayed more signally than in her relations with Mrs. Dakers and with Rachel. To Mrs. Dakers Edie was the incar-

nation of modesty and sweetness. Realizing, from the first moment, that the fact that Jonathan had married her was the slenderest of recommendations in Mrs. Dakers' mind, she deliberately slurred it, dwelling, with an insistence that was so skilfully affected as to appear above suspicion, upon the older woman's weaknesses; her affection for Chadshill, her infatuation for her husband's poetry, her belief, which now amounted to an obsession, in Harold's survival. Mrs. Dakers swallowed this demulcent mixture as a kitten laps cream. It convinced her, more surely than ever, that Edie was wasted on Jonathan and that she should be able to understand her resentment against him. "If only," she said quite frankly, "you had known my other boy!" And Edie, with a sore heart and smiling lips, allowed her to talk about Harold.

With Rachel the problem was much more difficult; for Rachel had no obsessions to be humoured nor any of the engaging simplicity that made Mrs. Dakers such an easy victim. In Rachel Edie encountered a diametrical opposite, mental and physical. Her silence, only broken by words of an uncompromising candour and directness, the penetrating honesty of her dark eyes, made Edie's tactful virtuosity look forced and spurious.

Realizing that no chain-mail of social skill could resist that arrowy scrutiny, Edie discarded her armour and flung herself, unarmed, on Rachel's mercy. They had, at least, she maintained, one interest in common, their fondness for Jonathan and their desire

for his happiness. Nobody in the world but they two realized how good Jonathan was. Humbly, as an older yet, perhaps, less intimate friend, she pleaded for the help that Rachel and no one else could give her in understanding and protecting him.

Luckily for Edie—since Rachel would soon have detected any falseness—this attitude, though stressed for her purpose was not assumed. She had always been fond of Jonathan ('fond' was the word) and the tragic events of the last months, culminating in his superb act of sacrifice, had taught her to realize how good he really was.

In this she spoke from her heart, and Rachel's heart was opened to her. Alone in the dispensary, when Jonathan was busy on his round, they talked about him for hours together; and, as they spoke, Edie, with a faint twinge of something that resembled jealousy, would see the dark eyes brighten, the pale cheek flush, and hear, in the tones of Rachel's voice, a warmth that disturbed her with a fleeting sense of her own unworthiness, her own dishonesty. In a little while she knew for herself what Harold had hinted to her many years before: that this dark woman was in love with Jonathan; and realized that Rachel, if the truth were told, had more to give him than she could ever give.

The realization was tragic; but then, all life was tragic. There was no time in it for sentiment, pity or regret. Edie had her own battles to fight—Heaven knew, the hardest of them still lay before her!—and here, by diplomacy however questionable, by affectation of

a simplicity whose falseness was tempered with some mixture of truth, she felt that she had made an ally on whose loyalty she could count.

Jonathan himself was overjoyed by Edie's conquest. If Rachel had rejected her advances his lot would have been harder than ever. Yet, in the result, his admiration for Edie's achievement was overshadowed by his appreciation of Rachel's. It was she, the victim, who had really conquered. Once more the consciousness of her loyalty, her magnanimity, overwhelmed him with an emotion that it was difficult to name.

Perhaps the most disturbing feature of his new relation with Edie was her gentle, her tender submissiveness to himself. It shattered his whole conception of her nature as something free and fiery, more fleet and more intangible than air. Her gratitude—if that common word were to describe it—took the form of a sweet and docile humility, a calm yet passionate desire to make amends, to repay him in kind for his willing sacrifice, that brought tears to his eyes. Sometimes, when they were alone, the desire to express this emotion would proclaim itself in a sudden, instinctive embrace.

"You are so good to me, Jonathan dear," she would murmur. "You're too good to me."

"Why do you say that, my child?" he would ask, himself moved yet embarrassed.

"Because I'm not worth it, Jonathan darling," she would answer. "Because, as you know quite well, I'm not fit to black your boots. I've never been anything

in my life but a heap of selfishness. Even my love for Harold was part of that. You make me ashamed of myself, my dear; that's what's the matter. And I want . . . I want. . . ."

"You needn't want anything," he told her. "All that I want on earth is that you should be happy. For God's sake don't begin to worry your brains about me."

She shook her head. "I must, I must," she said. "I've been thinking so much about you, Jonathan dear. I know that ever since you were children you've sacrificed yourself for Harold. And now, at the very last. . . ."

"Do you blame me, Edie?"

"Blame you? Heavens no! I'd have died for Harold myself. I worship you for it, Jonathan. But still . . . somehow . . . it doesn't seem quite fair."

"But that's just ridiculous, Edie. *I'm* perfectly happy."

"It isn't as if you could love me, Jonathan dear."

"Edie!"

But, all the same, he could not deny it. For the moment he was in the grip of an emotion different from, yet perhaps stronger than love: a mixture of pity and almost mystical devotion toward a figure once loved and always lovely to him, to which was added a loyalty, a fixed sense of duty, to the phantom ideal that had once been Harold, to the reincarnation of that which he had loved now living in Harold's child.

It was not only pity for Edie that impelled him

to drag her down from these dangerous levels of emotion to the state of practical comradeship, leavened by a humour at times ironical, which was the accepted condition under which they lived. At present that state was relatively easy; but a time was coming, and to be dreaded, in which she would be forced to leave Stourford and "settle down" at Wednesford; a time that would demand not only the humour and comradeship of which he knew she was capable, but further spiritual adjustments and a courage far greater than that which she had already displayed and he admired.

Almost before they were fully aware of its imminence that time was upon them. One afternoon the big Daimler from Stourford came bumping, for all its cantilever springs, over the roads, deep-rutted by the weight of munition lorries, which ran northward from Stourton into the waste about Wednesford. Inside it, lost amid its billowy upholstery, sat Edie surrounded by her few belongings. Jonathan ran out to meet her and carry her luggage into the house. He laughed and was full of high spirits; he was anxious to make this final homecoming seem a happy occasion, but noticed that Edie, for once, couldn't rise to his level of forced enthusiasm, that, though she smiled to greet him, her lips, when the smile faded, were shadowed by an expression of anxiety, like that look of vague foreboding which veils the faces of patients suffering from abdominal ills.



"You're feeling all right, my child?" he asked her, anxiously.

She brightened quickly. "Of course. Why do you ask?"

"Nothing. You look a trifle *triste*. That's all."

"The drive was tiring; these roads are simply awful."

"I think, perhaps, you'd better lie down for a bit. I'll bring up some tea to your bedroom."

"Thank you, Jonathan dear."

It was unlike her, he reflected, to accept his suggestion so readily. Evidently, for some reason or other, she felt disturbed in body or mind.

This disquietude was an ill omen for their future, a bad beginning. He tried to explain it, telling himself that the wrench of leaving Stourford, consecrated as it was by the memories of her passion and Harold's, had been too much for her; that the unromantic grimness of Wednesford and the prospect of living amidst it for the rest of her life had depressed her. That was natural enough, after all; yet, knowing Edie as he did, he would have expected her to confront the change with a higher courage. Poor child! He had never properly appreciated the difficulty of her position; her gallantry had made him forget that the most desperate phase of her ordeal was yet to come. It was with an unusual tenderness and anxiety to make things easy for her that he carried up the tray of tea to her room.

He found her lying there limp, like a little dead thing; she didn't even hear his step when he entered;

but as soon as she saw him she pulled herself together, rewarding him with the gentlest of thanks for his solicitude, talking, with an unusual vivaciousness, of her Stourford farewells. In the middle of a sentence she stopped, and gave a little "Oh!"

"What is it?" he asked her.

"Nothing" she answered quickly; then hesitated: "I suppose" she said, "I'd better tell you. We must tell our doctors everything, mustn't we Jonathan?"

Immediately he looked so alarmed that she had to laugh at him. "We had a little accident" she told him, "on the way over; nothing disastrous, you know; but it gave me a fright. Just outside Stourton we skidded on the tramlines. It wasn't the chauffeur's fault—don't dream of telling the Hingstons!—but for the moment it felt as if you were going to be a widower and your wife sent head-first through a plate-glass window. Oh, Jonathan, Jonathan," she teased him, "don't look at me like that! You've gone quite pale, you poor darling!" She drew his face towards her. "Did I scare you, Jonathan? You . . . a doctor! How scandalous! And really, my dear, I'm perfectly all right now."

"Truly?"

"My word of honour! But if you like, just to please you, I'll stay here till supper-time. Now run away, Jonathan dear, like a good child. I'm not going to keep you from your work any more."

The supper-table that evening was curiously gay.

Edie, it seemed, had completely recovered from her fright, and even Mrs. Dakers was in the best of spirits, cheered by the prospect of having someone to whom she could talk interminably about Mr. Dakers and Harold. The foreboding atmosphere of Edie's arrival had vanished entirely; her brilliance, her vivacity irradiated the sombre little room with a new, vital effulgence. They went on chatting happily long after the meal was finished, till Jonathan, of a sudden, realized that Edie had gone silent. He glanced at her, and saw again the look of anxiety that had distressed him. As their eyes met she smiled.

"I think, if your mother doesn't mind, Jonathan, I'll go upstairs again," she said.

He followed her anxiously. Still she evaded his questions. Yes, yes; a little pain. It was really nothing; why bother?

"It's my duty to bother" he told her. "You mustn't be foolish."

With a sigh she submitted. Five minutes later he was telephoning wildly to Martock, hearing, in his own tremulous voice, the urgency of a hundred voices that he had heard on the telephone, and in Martock's unemotional answers an echo of his own habitual tone of reassurance.

"I'll run along at once. Don't get rattled, old fellow," the calm and distant voice of Martock entreated him.

Jonathan was rattled; unreasonably, as he told him-

self. This was the first time that he, a doctor, had stood in a patient's shoes. He prowled up and down the surgery in an agony of expectation. What the devil, he wondered, was keeping Martock so long? When he, Jonathan, received urgent messages, he didn't hang about like this! He heard, in the hall, the voice of Mrs. Dakers querulously calling him: "Jonathan, Jonathan, where are you?"

"Here, mother. What do you want?"

"What is the matter, Jonathan?" she asked, her voice still offended. "Why do you leave me in the dark like this? What is it? I think you might have taken the trouble to tell me!"

"It's nothing, probably, mother. Edie's not well, as you saw. The drive may have upset her. I've telephoned to Arthur. Ah, here he is at last!"

Leaving Mrs. Dakers gasping, he hurried to meet Martock and poured out a repetition of what he had already told him.

"All right, old fellow, all right!;" Martock assured him, smiling and taking off his coat with an irritating deliberation. "Which room is it? I know. No, Jonathan, don't come with me. You'll only upset her. You newly married husbands are all the same."

He went. In the room below Jonathan listened to the murmur of a level voice, the sound of leisurely steps. Would this agony never be ended? At last Martock returned. There was no answering agony in his face. Callous devils, these doctors! He sat down in the

surgery and lit a cigarette, while Jonathan trembling, hung upon his words.

"A bit of bad luck" he said, "but nothing to cry about. She's told me about that skid. It's the fright that must have upset her. Of course we'll do all we can to settle things down; but, as you know, my dear Jonathan, it isn't so easy to stop a business of this kind when once it's begun. In the meantime you've no reason to worry about your wife; she's not half as disturbed as you are, if you want to know the truth."

"She doesn't realize what it means," Jonathan told him.

"Well, neither do you. That's the worst of being a doctor. Your blessed imagination gets to work. I'll send along the sister from the hospital—she understands midwifery—and look in once again before I go to bed."

Jonathan could hardly bear to let him go. "Look here, Arthur," he said. "We're old pals; we understand each other. Tell me, quite candidly, don't you think I'd better 'phone to North Bromwich for Jimmy Purswell? We're good friends: I know he'd come like a shot if I did. No offence to yourself, old fellow. You understand?"

"Do just as you like, my dear Jonathan," Martock told him. "I can only say that as far as I can see there's no earthly need. But, of course, if you'd rather. . . ."

Jonathan shook his head miserably. "No, no, of course there's no need. I'm a damned fool, Arthur. Please make allowances."

"You're not a damned fool, Jonathan" Martock laughed: "You're like all the rest of 'em. Better luck next time, old chap; that's all I can say."

Perhaps, after all, if this disaster were indeed unavoidable, his present luck was better than he realized. One thing, at least, became clear; if Edie's baby were to be born prematurely, as now seemed probable, Edie, not to mention himself, would be saved from an unpleasant scandal. It wasn't that he had not been prepared to face it; the prospect had been included, as a legacy from Harold, in their marriage contract; but curious minds, like those of Mrs. Perry and Mrs. Gaige, had a fiendishly accurate memory for dates, and if things had run their normal course these ladies would have had something to talk about.

In the meantime he suffered, for Edie and with her, as he had never suffered before. During the next twenty-four hours Martock came and went continually. His manner was sympathy itself; yet Jonathan knew that, in Martock's professional eyes, he was behaving hysterically. Hour after hour he sat in the surgery and thought, seeking refuge in that sanctuary from the querulous questionings of Mrs. Dakers, who already felt herself aggrieved by a conspiracy of silence. In the middle of the first night they realized that there was no hope for the child. To Jonathan, although he knew the bitterness of Edie's disappointment, this circumstance offered a glimmer of hope, which he persistently rejected as unworthy, for himself.

The extinction of that feeble spark of life, so ecstatically conceived, so pathetic in its ending, would remove the main material obstacle to his happiness with Edie. That happiness, he knew well, could never attain the exaltation which in his dreams he had once desired. Their marriage was what it was—on his side a gesture of generosity, on hers a convenience; yet marriage it still remained, an indissoluble relation. Out of this nightmare it might emerge, with bonds still unbroken, into the calm of a new, a saner consciousness. He knew that Edie did not love him, and had never loved him. He also knew that his own love for Edie, that winged passion, had fallen, bruised, from the empyrean to base earth. Was it possible, that, on this humbler plane, the broken thing might regain, if not its vanished bloom, at least some similitude of life? Might they, perhaps, in the community of pain and disappointment, contrive to make the best of a bad job together, and find, though never the splendid ecstasy of which each had dreamed, the consolations of an unselfish devotion, the relative serenity of a mode of life?

That hope achieved a shy and wintry blooming when, a week later, the baby buried, and Edie herself established on the way to recovery, he came to sit beside her. The shock and the exhaustion of her calamity had changed her, making her, though no less lovely, a different Edie. Her whiteness was more delicately flowerlike than ever before; she lay like a limp lily, her face almost translucent beneath the pale gold of her

braided hair. All that thin flame which once vivified her had flared itself away, leaving her chastened and, as it were, newly virginal. Her voice was low and gentle, her movements soft and hesitant; she seemed to Jonathan less like a mother than a creature newly born. When she spoke, a strange mingling of awe and pity arose in Jonathan, as if he were in the presence of something secret and not human, like the unfolding of a flower. Even so, the old directness showed itself in her speech. When she spoke of the dead baby it was without emotion, even without regret, as of a circumstance unconnected with herself. She echoed his own thoughts:

"I feel as if I'd been born again, Jonathan dear—do you remember Stevenson?—in an expurgated edition. All the time that they were keeping you away from me, I was thinking of you."

"Of me, Edie? Why? You had enough to think about in yourself, my dear."

"You've been so good to me, Jonathan. Almost too good to be true. Are you quite real? I wonder." She took his hand and fondled it; her frail, transparent fingers caressed it lightly as a butterfly's wing. Yes, you're quite real," she murmured dreamily. "I think you're more solid than anything else on earth, Jonathan dear. It's a shame that I should bring you nothing but suffering. God doesn't temper the wind to the shorn lamb, does he?" The flicker of a smile passed over her face. "Are you a shorn lambkin, Jonathan dear?" she mocked him.



A few days later she was sitting up in her room; her eager life was returning; she asked to see Rachel. Rachel came and sat with her, but Jonathan was excluded. "We're going to talk secrets," she told him, "aren't we, Rachel?" Rachel smiled. She knew from experience that they would talk about Jonathan.

People came to call with condolences, Mrs. Perry included. In the streets they condoled with Jonathan, saying: "Better luck next time!" And all the while he was wondering what would happen when Edie was really better. Would she want to go back to Stourford or would she stay with him? His mind was in a tumult; he couldn't honestly tell himself which he would prefer. It was Edie herself who finally broached the question.

"Arthur tells me" she said, "that after this week he'll have finished with me. I should like to know what you want me to do, Jonathan dear. Of course, the Stourford people are only too anxious for me to go back to them; but if you'd like me to stay here. . . . Which would you rather I did, Jonathan? Tell me truly."

"I should like to leave it entirely to you" he told her.

"Is that gallantry, politeness, or what?" she asked with a smile.

He shook his head, unable to answer her.

"I think I would rather stay," she said at last, and kissed him.

It was something; but not the kiss that he had once wanted. All through that day he went about his work

in a puzzled uncertainty, in strange bodily alternations of ice and fire. That evening, returning with a queer, subdued excitement, he found Edie sitting in the study alone. She did not rise to meet him as he had anticipated. Her face was like a death-mask; blank, utterly pitiful.

"Edie, whatever's the matter?" he cried. "Edie, what is it?"

For answer she only pointed to a letter that lay folded on the table. He opened it, full of wonder, and read what his eyes could not believe. The date was a couple of weeks' old, the address *Crefeld*; the hand Harold's.

*My own darling* (he read),

*God only knows if this letter will ever reach you. It's the first I've been able to write, and I'm sending it by a man I don't trust, under cover to someone in Sweden. Probably the censor will get hold of it on the way. I've had a ghastly time, my darling. Only just up for the first time. No more cricket for me! I've no idea what kind of reports may have reached you . . .*

A small, dull thud disturbed him; he looked up from the paper; through the mist that blurred his sight he had the impression of something small and pitiful crumpled up on the floor at the foot of the chair where Edie had been sitting.

## CHAPTER VIII

### HAROLD

THE sole outward and visible sign of Harold's unexpected return to the realm of the living was displayed in a characteristic gesture by Mrs. Dakers, who forthwith abandoned the figured cretonne and resumed her mourning. Three years before, this gesture might have created a sensation in Wednesford. Now, when it mattered little whether people were in mourning or out of it, when individual lives, lost or regained, seemed, in the new scale of values, matters of small importance, her moment of dramatic triumph failed in its effect. The past, and even the present, counted for little in those days; the Germans were evacuating the Hindenburg line, Bapaume, Bailleul had fallen to the British; St. Mihiel was threatened by Pershing; the end of the war was in sight.

Uninfluenced by this roaring conflagration, the smaller, secret drama of the Dakers household developed the heat, confined and intense, of an electric crucible which shrivelled and reduced to ashes those tender emotional growths that had shown signs of appearing. The War Office drily and tardily confirmed the news which Harold's smuggled letter had conveyed. Mrs. Dakers might wax splendidly voluble in the

triumph which confirmed the rightness of her instinct; Mrs. Perry, tremulous with nods and becks, might expatiate on the mercy which Providence had vouchsafed to balance, for Jonathan, the catastrophe of Edie's baby's death; the whole world of Wednesford might go mad with the prospect of victory so long withheld; but Edie and Jonathan, smitten by a sudden bewilderment, were strangely immune from the effects of these external emotions.

The basis of all their plans and speculations for the future had been swept away. The question which had engaged them so seriously as to whether Edie should return to Stourford or remain at Wednesford, had no longer any validity. Not only was Harold alive, but Harold, or what was left of Harold—for his letter had hinted at some devastating injury—would soon, in the present course of the German *débâcle*, be returning to them. Each realized, at heart, what this return implied; yet neither, out of pity for the other, dared speak of it.

A kind of spiritual paralysis descended on both of them. Incapable of action, and, for that matter, unwilling and frightened to face it, they went on living, side by side, yet utterly separate, involved in a web of secret and sombre thoughts above which the voluble inanities of Mrs. Dakers, sublimely innocent, spread a fantastic embroidery of speculation on what would happen when Harold returned. As to what really would happen neither of them had the least idea, except that it must be entirely different from what Mrs. Dakers predicted.

For Jonathan this period of waiting was complicated by problems which neither Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus nor his poor self could solve; they presented him with a complete bankruptcy of all his philosophies. Amidst clouds of uncertainty only one thing was clear: that the dream which had beckoned him, that wraith of his old desires which had risen from the ashes of their destruction, was no longer, slender though it might be, attainable. Before, the mere existence of Harold's baby had raised an effective barrier between him and Edie; if Harold himself were alive, he knew that she could never—not even in a modified acceptance of the phrase—be his. For the second and last time in his life that happiness had escaped him. Well, he was used by now to disappointment, to sacrifice, and, if he still demanded compensation, might surely find it in the fact that his beloved Harold was living.

Yet even if this were granted—and he was prepared to admit that he couldn't have it both ways—it made no difference to the difficulty of his position with Edie. When once the shock of Harold's first letter had passed (and her state of physical weakness had made her take it more hardly) she had faced the situation with a display of courage and serenity which it was almost intolerable to witness. She knew, as well as he did, that the basis of their relation had been changed; yet gratitude and a sense of obligation which the nobility that Jonathan attributed to her imposed, compelled her to match his generosity with an answering gesture. Her word

was her bond; it was beneath her dignity and her sense of justice to go back on it. She made it clear that she was willing to fulfil her own part of the bargain with a disarming humility and at all costs; but the gravity of the cost, however great her bravery, showed itself on her pitiful face even as the offer was made.

He could not accept it, and though the offer remained tacitly open and was even flaunted deliberately before him, he knew how thankful she was for his refusal. Robbed of this opportunity for a self-imposed sacrifice, she set herself, humbly and eagerly, to pay her debt of honour in other ways. Her solicitude, her tenderness for the man she had wounded knew no bounds, and inflicted, although she could scarcely know it, new wounds when he came to realize the sweetness, the gentleness that, as a substitute for passion, she might have given him.

Out of this pathetic atmosphere of offer and refusal, alike unspoken, there emerged in that period of expectation, broken by the sudden joy-bells and following silence of the Armistice, a strange new comradeship, wordless, yet full of understanding, which, paradoxical though it may seem, had a quiet sweetness of its own. At first, as though by consent, they avoided all mention of Harold; though Harold, as each of them knew, was always in the other's mind. His presence possessed them continually. Often, when Edie was silent, Jonathan knew that she was thinking of Harold in Crefeld, colouring her imagination with those memories of indus-

trial Rhineland which she had brought back with her from her hospital-work in Elberfeld. He did not grudge her these thoughts; he even felt that it was his duty to encourage them, and extracted a curious pleasure from its performance.

Tentatively and by slow degrees they began to speak of Harold openly. Earlier, hearing his name on Mrs. Dakers' foolish lips, Edie had winced for fear of its hurting Jonathan; but now that she knew that the sound of it did not wound him, she felt a glad relief in talking of Harold and easing the pressure of silence on her own heart. And Jonathan, equally relieved, encouraged her; so that now, when they walked together, talking of the old happy days at Silver Street, it almost seemed as if Harold were present in the spirit beside them.

By the beginning of December prisoners were returning from Germany in a steady stream. Mrs. Dakers, confident in the confirmation of her instinct, proclaimed it as a definite fact that Harold would be with them for Christmas and made plans for their reunion. "We will give him an old-fashioned English Christmas of the kind that his father loved," she said. She walked down the High Street in her flowing robes, confiding the nature of her preparations to all her Wednesford acquaintances, inspecting the qualities and prices of holly and mistletoe in the greengrocers' shops, deciding that neither were up to the standard of Mr. Dakers' days. Her husband, she said, would have been positively shocked to see them. Did Jonathan remember—no, of

course he wouldn't!—his father's little poem about the mistletoe? Harold, when he came would be certain to recall it!

Once more, as luck would have it, Mrs. Dakers prophesied correctly. Three days before Christmas a wire from Harold arrived. He had reached London on the previous evening and reported at the War Office. Medical Headquarters had given him a month's leave to be going on with. He suggested that Jonathan should meet his train in North Bromwich.

"What did I tell you?" Mrs. Dakers demanded triumphantly. She continued to ask that question again and again, for her success as a prophetess had gone to her head. Heedless of her chatter, Jonathan and Edie looked at each other solemnly. They knew that the hardest moment of their ordeal had come.

"Would you like to go and meet him?" Jonathan asked her.

"No, Jonathan dear, it would look . . . funny. I think you'd better go."

Her eyes were full of a compassion that made it no easier.

"All right," he said gently. "We must get through it somehow."

"You poor, poor darling!" Edie whispered to him.

On the sulphurous platform of the Midland Station Jonathan waited for Harold's train. He walked up and down, possessed by a wild agitation, thrilled by the prospect of his first glimpse of Harold, composing, over and



over again, in a futile search for a possible formula, the shape of the intolerable *éclaircisse*, that awaited him.

The train burst in from the South; it filled the gaping mouth of the tunnel with curdled smoke. A tide of scrambling Christmas shoppers, burdened with parcels, carried him along with them as his eyes searched the gliding carriage windows for Harold's face. In the riot that followed he could see nobody resembling Harold, till, all of a sudden, he felt a firm hand on his shoulder and found himself staring into his brother's blue eyes. The eyes were Harold's indeed, but that face, that gaunt body? What travesty was this of the gallant image that had possessed his memory, this lank, bent spectre in a torn, stained tunic, with one arm strapped in a sling? Behind those eyes he could read a tale of incredible hardships and privations; yet the voice that issued from the twisted lips was surely Harold's.

"Hello, Jonathan old boy," he was saying. "At last! You look pretty fit."

Jonathan grasped the one hand that was free and wrung it: "I'm always fit, Hal. Have to be. You don't look too well, though."

"Damned lucky to look anything at all!" the spectre laughed; and Jonathan saw that his smile had lost two teeth. This discovery gave him the greatest shock of all. It was a trifle, and yet he found himself continuing to stare at Harold's mouth.

"Let's see; what about luggage?" he murmured, in

an attempt to be practical. "Yes, luggage!" he repeated with assured conviction.

"Luggage? Good God! *My* luggage is on my back. I say Jonathan, when's the next train for Wednesford? Have we time for a bun and a cup of tea? D'you know that in Crefeld I pined for a Bath bun? Got the thing on my mind. Never wanted one before in my life. I've been gorging like a wolf ever since I landed in London." He laughed uneasily.

"The train goes in forty minutes," Jonathan told him. "Can I carry anything?" The idea of baggage still foolishly obsessed him, but Harold apparently overlooked his stupidity.

"No, but you might give me an arm, old chap," he said. "My left leg's a bit groggy as well as this blessed arm. Wrist-drop; a machine-gun bullet clean through the musculo-spiral. No more cricket for me, old Jonathan!"

No more cricket for me! He had used the phrase once before, in Edie's letter. Its five words symbolized, more poignantly than any others he could have chosen, the tragedy of this sad piece of human wreckage. Deeply affected, Jonathan gave Harold his arm and led him to the refreshment room. There, with an arch, blonde barmaid for witness, amid marble-topped tables littered with hastily abandoned tea-things, the stage was set for this most cruel scene.

"Have you heard anything lately of Edie Martyn?" Harold asked, with a too-carefully affected casualness.

"Eddie has written to you several times. She wrote as soon as she had your letter from Crefeld. It was through her that we heard about you first. Haven't her letters reached you?"

"Not one of them. How is she?" Harold asked carelessly.

"She's . . . very well." Jonathan hesitated. "Much better . . . " He almost added "thank you."

"What? Has she been ill?" Was this anxiety significant? Jonathan wondered.

"Yes, she's been ill," he answered, still playing for time. Why should he keep it up any longer? What good would it do? He plunged: "You know she's married?"

"Married?" The words came with a gasp; but Harold quickly recovered himself. He was looking across at Jonathan with the same marred smile. "Married? Good Lord!" He repeated the word with sublime composure; then, added, indifferently: "Who to?"

"To me, Hal."

"God!"

Jonathan caught his arm. For a moment it seemed as though he and Harold and the marble-topped table were going over together; Harold had clutched it suddenly, his head ducked like that of a man over whom a wave has broken, deafening and blinding. Almost at once he straightened himself and emerged from it.

"I'm all right, thanks Jonathan. You'd better tell me about this," he said grimly.

"Not here. I can't tell you in here; and you can't listen. Let's get away out of this place."

Leaving the spilt tea and the mangled bun behind them, they passed out, arm in arm, on to the smoky, shrieking platform. They walked together, not knowing where they went, till Jonathan became aware that they were skirting the very bay from which, many years before, his father and he had been used to take the afternoon train out to Chadshill. Above the huge echoes of the station's glass dome, the snorts and shrieking whistles of locomotives, the trundling of milk-cans and grinding of trolley wheels over stone flags, he could hear his own voice, strained and high-pitched, shouting his monstrous news into Harold's ears. Up and down the platform, where Mr. Dakers with his dispatch-case had hurried in former days, they passed, walking slowly, reeling, arm in arm, like two drunken men. All through the agonized recital Harold spoke no word. When Jonathan had ended, he faced him with a ghastly smile:

"God, it's too funny!" he cried. "It's too damned ridiculous!" His voice broke into a cackle of mad laughter that was anything but funny to Jonathan. Suddenly, with a new effort, Harold appeared to recover himself.

"And now," he said grimly, "of course you are living together?"

"Hal, my dear Hal, please understand this: there's been nothing . . . of that kind."

"Hasn't there? I don't understand. Whose fault was that?" his harsh voice asked brutally.

Jonathan shook his head; he couldn't answer him. He took Harold's arm once more. "Come along, old chap," he said gently. "If we hang about here we shall miss the Wednesford train."

"Do you still think I'm going with you, Jonathan? After that? No, no! There's a limit, God damn it!"

"Mother's expecting you, Hal. She'll never forgive me if I don't bring you back with me. Come along, now, there's a good fellow."

"I can't. I can't face it. Good God, Jonathan, what do you think I'm made of? Later, perhaps. Not to-day. I must think about this. I'll put up for the night in North Bromwich somewhere, or go back to London. Edie's there of course?"

"She's expecting you too."

"No, no, that's too much. Give me time. I'm all upside down."

"For mother's sake, Hal, come along," Jonathan entreated. "It won't be as bad as you think."

"As bad as I think?" he repeated savagely. "You don't know what you're talking about."

Yet he was so weak, so bewildered, that when Jonathan took him by the arm he allowed himself to be led, like a child, to the Wednesford train.

## CHAPTER IX

### SAD LOVERS

It was fortunate after all, that Jonathan managed to get Harold to Wednesford that evening. If he had been left in North Bromwich heaven knows what would have happened to him. In the train, on the journey out, his nerves gave way entirely, the pent emotions of his seven months in prison breaking suddenly into floods of terrible tears. Luckily they were alone in the grimy railway carriage: for though people were used, by this time, to the passionate crises of the shell-shocked, the scene would have been even more painful if it had been performed in public.

Jonathan was helpless; he knew that the least word spoken, however tactfully, might fire a fuse leading straight to some new explosive centre. He sat there, at Harold's side, with a drawn, harrowed face, holding a hand that twitched with spastic contractions, praying that no stranger might peer inside the drawn blinds of the compartment before those tormented nerves were exhausted by their own fury. By the time that they neared Wednesford Harold's violence had worn itself out, leaving its victim mute, crushed, scarcely sentient, like one whose brain has lately been shattered by a storm of epilepsy. Now he was too dazed to know or

care what Jonathan did with him. In a rapt and dreamy docility, which was even more pitiful than his former excitement, he allowed himself to be shepherded out of the station and into the car which had been left to await their return.

Arrived at the house, Jonathan made the best of his bad job, and ushered Harold into it with a show of cheerfulness. He hoped to God that Edie would be out of the way, for the sight of her might easily precipitate another breakdown. Some merciful instinct must have warned her of this danger; as they entered the study, festooned with Mrs. Dakers' festive holly and mistletoe, he saw, with relief, that Edie wasn't there.

But Mrs. Dakers was . . . and very much so! She had planned that this scene of reunion should be played according to the best Chadshill traditions. Magnificent, in black velvet, she awaited Harold in her accustomed chair, her grey-gold head bent downward, one hand idly trailing, the other poised, turning the page of the book that lay open on her lap. A shaded light illuminated her bowed head; between her and the door, in which Harold would appear, stretched an open alley, cleared of furniture. No doubt, as Jonathan had intended, she had heard their voices in the hall; but to admit that she had done so would have spoiled the tableau. Their entrance surprised her exquisitely posed, so intent on turning her page that she was not aware of it. It was left to Jonathan, who respected the dramatic

convention, to announce their presence in words inadequate to the occasion.

"Here he is, mother," he proclaimed with a rhythm that was anything but Shakespearean.

Mrs. Dakers gave an audible gasp; the bowed head lifted suddenly and was thrown backward; the hand that had been trailing clutched her breast. "Harold . . . my son!" she said. "Harold, my own brave boy."

She rose, magnificently; through the cleared space she swam toward him, holding out her arms.

"Harold!" But now the word had another tone, it was no longer that of a tragedy queen; it rose, shrill, uncontrolled, from the shocked, frightened heart of a human woman. "Harold, my darling!" she gasped. Throwing every canon of the theatre to the winds, her voice choked with tears, her movements uncalculated and ungainly, Mrs. Dakers clasped the pitiful figure in her arms. She patted his gaunt head, kissed his wan cheeks, and pressed her own streaming face against them, soothing him, all the time, with queer fantastic endearments, whispered between tears and laughter, which probably had never visited her lips since Harold was a baby, thirty years before.

Acutely moved, Jonathan turned away and left this scene in which he had no part. That moment was, perhaps, the first in all his life in which he had seen his mother forget to act. Possibly her love for Harold was the only real feeling that ever stirred her. That this passion which released her from the bonds of elocution



and deportment was genuine he could not doubt. Yes, she loved Harold, in her inhuman way; and Harold, poor devil, had need of all the love that he could find.

For the moment his condition was so pitiful, he was so broken in mind and body, that the larger questions which loomed in the background need not be faced. His proper place was in hospital, or at least in bed. So Arthur Martock, hastily summoned by Jonathan that evening, decreed. Harold was packed away upstairs, under rigid orders, in the care of Mrs. Dakers, who rose to the emergency as she had never done since the days of her husband at Chadshill, when her life had consisted of doing nothing else. For a week at least Martock forbade all visitors. Even without this authority Jonathan would have been chary of allowing Harold and Edie to meet; the results of his breaking the news in North Bromwich had been so terrible that he dared not run the risk of an actual encounter.

To Edie, when they were alone, he told the whole story of that meeting word for word, neither concealing nor softening a single phase of it. In all that affected Harold their relation, of late, had reached a degree of honesty which he felt it would have been impious to mar. She listened to him, apparently less moved in the hearing than he in the narration. Her courage, as always, was admirable; no sign of emotion showed itself upon her set and lovely features.

"He loves you as much as ever, Edie," he told her. She shook her head and sighed.

"I think you had better not see him just yet," he said lamely.

"You know best," she agreed. "I will see him when you allow me."

"Martock really is pleased with him. He says we shall be able to get him up in a few days now."

But not even this cheerful news moved Edie's set face. Of course, as a matter of fact, it was anything but cheerful; the meeting of these tragic lovers would be, inevitably, the most dreadful experience that either of them had known. Jonathan, consumed with pity for both, was utterly helpless. He could count on Edie's courage dealing with the intolerable situation; but Harold, poor dear—even the convalescent Harold who was now prepared to joke with him as he lay on the sofa upstairs, his legs, his fingers, his thin face elongated with the distortion of a yellow El Greco—this Harold was still a creature of less calculable reactions. Sooner or later, however, the bad moment must come. In some ways, the sooner the better. He mentioned it to Harold in Martock's presence with a calculated casualness.

"Edie would like to see you to-day if Arthur allows it."

"Why not?" said Martock innocently. "She'll cheer him up. You're old friends, aren't you?"

"Very old friends," said Harold.

"This afternoon, then," Martock suggested. "You need hardly remind her that the patient mustn't be ex-

cited. But then, Mrs. Jonathan, you know, has far more sense than most people. An ideal doctor's wife, you lucky devil! Old Jonathan doesn't change much does he, Hal? Even now he hasn't got the look of a married man."

Harold smiled somewhat grimly; the way in which he accepted Martock's unconscious irony was encouraging; the smile showed that his nerves were well under control.

"Martock would like you to see him this afternoon," Jonathan told Edie. "Tell me quite frankly: would you rather I came with you?"

"I'd much rather you didn't, Jonathan dear. I don't think there's anything to be gained by your coming with me."

Her quick refusal made him feel that he had committed a blunder in tact. That afternoon he took good care to be well out of the way, saving up a number of visits at the other end of the town and walking there to keep his mind engaged. Outside the hospital, as luck would have it, he ran into Craig who, rather unwillingly, had just been demobilized. The surprise was so great that Craig was startled into greeting Jonathan: a thing which he hadn't done for many years. Craig's thick lips parted in an ugly smile as he wished him good-day and left him wondering—not so much at Craig's acknowledgment of his existence as at the change that had overtaken Craig himself.

Often enough, during the war, Jonathan had seen

Craig in Wednesford, an iron-grey figure, erect and soldierly in his major's uniform; he had admired him and, perhaps, a little envied him. But Craig demobilized and in mufti was very different from Craig in khaki. That potent figure, shorn of the military envelope, seemed, somehow, to have lost its commanding air. During the course of the war the man had toppled over that definite barrier which separates what people generously call the prime of life from the beginning of old age. Concealed by uniform, which reduced all its wearers to a greatest common measure of appearance, this change had not been noticeable; but now, as Jonathan encountered him outside the Hospital, sitting bolt upright in the tonneau of his old-fashioned car, it seemed to him as if Craig had shrunk in every physical and spiritual direction. He could hardly believe that this was the man who had wrecked old Hammond, whom he himself had known good reason to fear. It even seemed to him, fantastically, that there was something reminiscent of old Hammond about Craig's grizzled face: as though by some nemesis of sympathetic magic, the destroyer had been condemned to wear on his own features traces of his victim's. For the first time in Jonathan's life he felt sorry for Craig, and not in the least afraid of him. It was like encountering in after-life the bully of one's schooldays, and finding him less powerful and less imposing than oneself.

These reflections on the gravity of time's revenges, and the consciousness that he himself, no less than

Craig, must some day be subject to them, carried Jonathan through the hour of Edie's interview with Harold. Looking at his watch as he neared home, he knew that it must be over. He entered the house nervously, prepared for some new shock.

No shock awaited him. Whatever had happened, Jonathan never knew. Neither that evening nor later did Edie vouchsafe him a single word about it. It was her first lapse from the complete candour which had marked their relations with regard to Harold. He couldn't blame her. He realized that there were sanctities into which he could not presume to intrude. And Harold was equally reticent. However distressing the meeting might have been, the fact that he had emerged from it without disaster seemed to have renewed his confidence in himself. Perhaps he had drawn courage from Edie's inexhaustible store: perhaps his strength was based on the assurance of some decision which they had made between them. Jonathan could not tell. He only knew that, from that day forward, Harold steadily improved, not only in general health but in mental composure.

Now that his emotional condition was so much more stable, Martock began to take his paralysed arm in hand. There had been, as Harold knew, an injury to the right musculo-spiral nerve. Whether the damage was as serious as Harold imagined was another matter. Of course it had been neglected in Germany; but Martock, to whom the war had given a wide experience in these matters, was inclined to think that Harold had uncon-

sciously increased the disability by imagining it to be graver than it actually was, and making no attempt to move the limb. He prescribed electricity, which he himself could administer, together with massage and passive movements. It was a wonderful bit of luck, he said, to find a qualified masseuse like Edie on the spot. Jonathan, he joked, must surely have foreseen this contingency when he married her.

By this time Harold was no longer imprisoned in his room; he was taking part in the ordinary life of the household, and Jonathan, whose work had been suddenly lightened by Craig's return, was able to keep the others company. There, through the long winter evenings, they sat together, the four of them; Mrs. Dakers, still blandly elated, and even humanized by Harold's return; Edie, sometimes silently reading, sometimes massaging Harold's arm, yet always a trifle remote and restrained, though eager to humour Jonathan, to prove to herself and to everyone else that he still came first; Harold, his renewed strength proclaiming itself in a restless vitality, veiled, yet impatient of his narrow surroundings, appearing, every moment, to be on the point of bursting out of them, but restrained, like a child that has been put upon his best behaviour, for Edie's sake; and Jonathan—Jonathan trying to pretend that here was a united and happy party, yet conscious all the time, of the deliberate, the heroic effort that Edie and Harold were making between them to spare him from the least feeling of awkwardness. It

was ironically typical that Mrs. Dakers should have contributed to the embarrassment of all of them by her determined attempts to throw Edie and Harold together in minor situations of intimacy, encouraging them, all the time, to seek each other's company, as though she felt sure that Jonathan was inadequate to the entertainment of either.

And Jonathan only wished to Heaven they would follow her advice. Anything in the world would have been better than the devastating correctness of behaviour on which, in conspiracy, they had evidently determined.

Watching the faces of these two, who, for better or worse, alas! would always be lovers, he felt, more acutely than they could ever imagine, the pain they were trying to spare him. To see them together, to feel, beneath the bright kindliness that they invariably displayed toward him, the ache of their private tragedy was almost more than he could bear. He found himself leaving them alone, deliberately, even more for his own sake than theirs, yet knowing that whether he were present or absent, the discipline which they had accepted would still impose its monstrous weight upon them.

"How will it end?" he thought. "How *can* it end?" There was only one issue from this purgatory that seemed right or reasonable. And that, perversely, was not to be arrived at easily, since neither Edie nor Harold was disposed to accept the least relaxation of their self-imposed penance, particularly from him.

Edie, of the two, was the more approachable; with Harold he had never quite recaptured an intimacy sufficient to deal with so delicate a subject. With Edie, as a tribute to her own directness, Jonathan was frank to the degree of brutality.

"Edie," he said "tell me truly; you and Harold are still in love with each other?"

"Oh Jonathan, Jonathan, why talk about it?" she answered with an impatient weariness. "It isn't as if there were anything to be gained by speaking of it."

"That's where you're wrong, my child. It's when they're unspoken that things of this kind have power to poison the soul."

She shook her head. "My soul's not poisoned in the least, thank you, Jonathan dear. That's over, all over," she said. "All over," she repeated, as though the words were a magical formula accumulating virtue by sheer repetition.

"Do you think I should be shocked or hurt if it weren't over?" he asked.

"I don't know, Jonathan dear," she answered with supreme innocence. "The question can't even arise. Why do you waste our time by talking like this?"

"Because you're not happy, Edie. For no other reason."

"Happy? Why, Jonathan, how can you possibly judge? I assure you I'm happy. Very happy indeed." She spoke the words musingly, as if, once more she were calculating their influence on her own mind. "Let's



talk about something else, Jonathan darling. Please!" she entreated.

"I can't talk of anything else. This thing's on my mind. You know that you're only persuading yourself that you're happy. Auto-suggestion. Faith."

"You're a bad friend, Jonathan, trying to undermine my faith."

"It's a false position for both of you. It's intolerable!"

"Who to?"

"To me." He hadn't meant to put it that way, but, when the word slipped out, he was naïvely pleased and proud of it. He thought: that'll take the wind out of her sails!

"Oh well, of course, if you put it that way . . ." she said. "If you really feel me intolerable, Jonathan dear. . . . However," she continued with a brisk and practical cheerfulness, "in another week or so Harold will be going away; so that's *that*." She closed the subject finally, precisely, like a licked envelope, and sealed it with a smile—not exactly of challenge but of complete security; she was so sure of herself that she could afford to smile.

"This is all news to me," Jonathan said, almost irritably. "Who's said that Harold's going away next week?"

"I've said so, Jonathan dear. Harold and Arthur will agree with me. On purely medical grounds."

"Ridiculous! There's nothing in his treatment that

he can't get here. Your massage is the most important part of it."

"Thank you, Jonathan dear."

"Oh, Edie, don't laugh at me like that. I'm serious."

"Frightfully."

"If Harold is going away, you ought to go with him."

"Am I to understand," she answered calmly, "that you want to get rid of me?"

"I want you to be happy," he told her, almost roughly.

"Your happiness is mine, Jonathan. That sounds banal, but it's the solemn truth."

"Then, for God's sake, let's end this sham! Let's be frank about it. You belong to Harold. It isn't as if you had ever been . . . my wife."

"Whose fault is that, Jonathan?" she answered, with a look of unhesitating candour.

"Edie!"

"Well, you said: Let's be frank! I'm only trying. . . ." She smiled.

"Edie . . . this isn't a laughing matter," he protested.

"Jonathan, darling, if it weren't—in some ways—I should have died long ago," she said.

However he tried to corner her she escaped him. Defeated by her at every turn he determined to make another attempt with Harold. The opportunity arrived when Harold opened, of his own accord, the subject

of his departure, to which Edie had already referred.

"I've been having a talk with Arthur about this arm of mine," he announced. "It's mending extraordinarily well up to a point. But the army's responsible to me. No doubt they'd be jolly glad to get rid of the responsibility; but when my leave's up, next week, I mean to ask them to deal with it. After all, it's up to them to see me through before I'm demobilized; so when I report at the War Office next Thursday I shall ask them what they intend to do about it. What they will do, of course, is to shove me into hospital again. Three weeks ago I simply couldn't have faced it; my nerves were all over the shop; but now, apart from the arm, I'm perfectly fit again. You know they have special hospitals for this sort of thing in these days. They seem to have abandoned the old business of nerve-grafting; but Arthur tells me that Robert Jones has been transplanting flexor muscles to get the extension that I've lost. It's worth a try anyway. I shall go up Monday."

His attitude was so reasonable and so strongly reinforced by Martock's advice that Jonathan couldn't honestly object to it. He had been prepared to entreat Harold to stay on at Wednesford—not for Edie's sake (which was his real reason) but for the plausible sake of Mrs. Dakers. The argument of filial duty failing, he found himself completely disarmed; the more so since Edie and Harold contrived to discuss the latter's approaching departure in his presence with astounding

cheerfulness. As to how they felt and spoke about it in private he could not guess; in public, apparently, it was he, not they, who suffered.

Indeed, his only index of the state of Edie's feelings was afforded by her attitude to himself: the more humble, the more cheerful, the more gentle, the more assiduous she showed herself in her devotion, the more surely he was convinced that her love for Harold remained unabated as a source of ecstasy and of pain. During the last days of Harold's stay at Wednesford her sweetness, her complaisance became so angelic that he could bear it no longer. In the providential absence of Mrs. Dakers, who had yielded to Mrs. Perry's persuasions to recite at a mother's meeting, Jonathan boldly tackled her and Harold together, in the study after tea.

There, amid admonitory reminders of Mr. Dakers, he laid bare his heart to them with a lack of dramatic finesse that Mr. Dakers if he were listening must surely have deplored. From the first moment he felt at a disadvantage: not only was he in a minority of one to two, but also those two, forewarned by Edie's experience of his last attempt, were forearmed against him. Before their united composure his passionate arguments lost half their weight—partly because they were so united in their determination to separate; partly because they belonged so definitely to another and a newer generation and were immune from the sentiment which weighed so heavily with his. To them it meant less

than nothing. Before their determined realism he was made to look hopelessly, weakly futile and romantic.

"Do let's be candid," he said. They were prepared to be candid. "Try to be reasonable." Their reason was as hard and cold as ice. "The whole position's intolerable." On the contrary, as anyone could see, they were bearing it. "In the eyes of God, Hal, Edie belongs to you, and will always belong to you." The younger generation had not much use for God; in the eyes of man, Edie was Jonathan's wife; the past was the past, they had made up their minds about it. "To go on in this way is positively immoral." Morality, Harold bluntly suggested, had never been their strong suit. "But you love each other!" Neither of them would answer. Like a couple of obstinate children they defied him. It was almost as if they were laughing up their sleeves.

"It seems as if I can do nothing with you," he said at last, perversely disgusted by their solidarity. "If Harold is going on Thursday, you ought to go with him, Edie."

She shook her head. "Oh, Jonathan, why *can't* you leave me alone?"

"I'm not going to leave you alone," he continued to maintain. "Of course I see now—I was speaking too hastily—that wouldn't be fair to you. I'd got it the wrong way round. Stupid not to realize it! Well, the other way's simple enough; it's done every day of the week. To-night I shall go into North Bromwich

and take a room at the Grand Midland with some woman or other. To-morrow I'll send Edie the bill as evidence of adultery. Then Edie will leave me." Edie shook her head slowly. "For God's sake don't be a fool, darling." The comic association of words didn't trouble Jonathan. "You can go where you please—to Stourford, to Silver Street, anywhere. Harold will be in hospital, somewhere else. Well out of the way. You can say what you like, you two; but that's what I'm going to do," he ended triumphantly.

Edie continued to shake her head. "You can *do* what you like, Jonathan dear—I'm not suggesting that you'll like the North Bromwich lady—but you can be quite certain of one thing: that won't make me divorce you."

"Why ever not?" he protested. "You're perverse, you're preposterous, both of you! If it comes to that," he went on with a savage humour, "I'll see to it that the evidence isn't merely . . . technical."

"That isn't the point, my dear Jonathan," Harold, speaking for the first time, interrupted. "Edie's perfectly right; she's always right. In your usual ridiculous way you're entirely forgetting to consider yourself."

"Myself? I'm considering nothing but myself. Please make no mistake," he laughed bitterly; "don't imagine that the present state of affairs is conducive to happiness."

"I'm not thinking of happiness," Harold replied.

"I'm speaking of your professional position which you're calmly proposing to ruin. Wednesford isn't particularly squeamish, my dear boy, but all the odds are on its drawing the line at a doctor who goes running after women in North Bromwich in the first year of his married life. That didn't occur to you, I suppose?"

"Honestly, Hal, old fellow, it makes no difference to me."

"It wouldn't. But it makes a devil of a lot to me. And Edie. Look here, Jonathan. All through our lives—you probably aren't aware of this, but Edie and I are—all through your life you've been making sacrifices of one kind or another, mostly for me. Don't contradict me now: I'm speaking by the book. First Harrow; then Cambridge; then this medical business; then Edie. In return for all these sacrifices I've let you down time after time. No use denying it: Edie and I know that better than anybody. And now . . . well, to cut it short, this business must stop. That's all about it. Edie agrees with me."

"Then God help you for a pair o' damned fools!" Jonathan grumbled and, at that moment, Mrs. Dakers arrived, flattered and flustered, after her recitation of the mad scene in *Hamlet* to the awed mothers of Wednesford. "Your dear father," she said, "would have been thrilled to see their attentiveness. You could have heard a hairpin drop."

So Harold, desperately cheerful to the end, departed

and was installed in the Great Orthopædic Hospital at Roehampton. For a time they heard nothing of him. He had always been a bad hand at letter-writing. The unreasonable part of it, to Jonathan's mind, was that he didn't even write to Edie. As Edie's natural protector he felt aggrieved by this neglect. Chivalry was all very well, but Edie, poor dear, was surely entitled to a little distant encouragement! He told her so.

"We decided not to write," she said.

"You're behaving fantastically, both of you," he informed her, almost losing his temper. "For years you have accused me of being a sentimentalist. Now it's you who are being sentimental. The boot's on the other foot, with a vengeance. Upon my soul! . . ."

Her answer was a confident smile. She did not dispute it. He knew, by a hundred daily signs, how much she missed Harold. Scrutinizing her face when she didn't know he was looking, Jonathan was aware of an awful emptiness in it. He saw that she was growing thin and losing the beauty which had been tempted into a tragic efflorescence by Harold's return. She was lonely, too, and tried, with a pathetic naturalness, to salve her loneliness with Jonathan's company. She leaned on him, clung to him, went with him everywhere; not only because she believed it was her duty to do so, but because she was happier with him than anywhere else. The sense of her dependence moved him to profound tenderness. It did more than that. It proved to him, by the definiteness with which this



emotion was qualified, the exact nature of his present relation to her. It showed him—and the discovery was at once a shock and a relief—that, however else he might feel for Edie, he was no longer in love with her.

## CHAPTER X

### PARTHIAN ARROWS

IT was only since his marriage to Edie that Jonathan had realized how much Rachel meant to him. The day of old Hammond's retirement, which had removed her from the surgery to the new house in Wolverbury Road, had been the first break in an intimacy so established by the comradeship of nearly ten years that he had ended by taking it for granted without realizing its importance to both of them; but the embarrassment of that separation had been mitigated by the fact that, though their domestic relation had been broken and the assurance of her continual presence denied him, Rachel still came to dispense for two long periods in every day. Somewhat bewildered at first, Jonathan, had gradually adjusted himself to the new position, looking forward, more eagerly than he understood, to their daily meetings, still counting on Rachel's support in the professional part of his life.

No sooner was this adjustment made than the news of Harold's casualty had thrown Edie into his arms. This catastrophe, and the marriage that followed it, had descended on him so swiftly, submerging all his past in the confusion of an urgent present, that he had not even noticed the subtle change in Rachel's attitude

towards him. Sufficient to those days were their own turbulent emotions, and even more shattering the swift events that followed: the confusion that began with Edie's disaster and ended with Harold's return.

It was only when the convalescent Harold had settled down with Edie and himself into the virtuous *ménage à trois*, from which Jonathan deemed it only decent to retire that he had begun to realize the gravity of his loss. Edie, with her keen instinct for self-protection, had taken good care to make a friend of Rachel; and the very existence of this friendship had excluded Jonathan more completely than ever from the only intimacy on which he could count. Returning, like a hurt child, but with the most unexceptionable motives, to Rachel's comforting presence, he found himself faced with correct reservations that took the ground from under his feet.

The very fact that she loved him, had always loved him, made Rachel's position more difficult. Even though she could not divine the cause of his suffering, her love made her recognize and share it. The gates of her heart stood wide open to receive him, to comfort him; her loyalty to herself and to Edie, who had appealed to her pity, closed her lips. Bitterly, deliberately, she had steeled herself in a secure aloofness which puzzled and wounded Jonathan (and therefore herself), rigidly avoiding the merest approach to any accident that might release emotions dangerous to all of them. The situation was not without its aspects of comedy: Edie, denying herself to the man she loved for the sake of one who

did not love her; Rachel, refusing the friendship of the man whom she adored for the sake of a woman who did not love him; poor innocent Jonathan, at once an object of compassion and a victim of them both!

It was fortunate for all of them that the effects of Rachel's withdrawal and Edie's self-sacrifice were exactly opposite to what either of them intended. No sooner had Rachel refused her intimacy to Jonathan than he began to realize how much he valued it; to see that, in the last resort, his happiness lay in her hands; to know that she meant more to him than anyone else on earth; to apprehend, perhaps for the first time, the splendours of her generous nature, the beauty which, more than once, had moved him so unexpectedly.

Now looking backward, he supposed that he had always loved her; that the emotion with which, in remembered moments, her presence had stirred him, had been deeper than that dreamy idealization of Edie, that phantom of the ardours of first love, for which, with a false sense of treachery, he had rejected it. He knew now—and never more acutely than when she was beside him—how like a marsh-fire, an *ignis fatuus*, that flickering flame of Edie was. For years he had followed it, blind to all other light; and when at last, by a freak of celestial irony, it had fallen into his hands, the pale, thin flame had vanished, leaving him bereft of joy in a bewildered darkness. Out of that darkness he stumbled now toward a flame more steadfast. More steadfast, and, alas, even colder!

Yet now, the more she chilled him with her reservations, the more certain he became of the rightness, the authenticity of his newly discovered love. No matter whether Rachel acknowledged or rejected it, he could not be denied the satisfaction of a happiness that had its seat and origin within himself. Not only did this momentous discovery thrill him with secret ecstasies, drawing from Rachel's proved stability the consoling consciousness of something permanent amid his present uncertainties; it even pointed to a way of escape out of the darkness through which he and Harold and Edie were blundering. If Harold and Edie could be convinced that he was in love with Rachel, and, for that matter, had always loved her, the path to their own happiness, so dutifully renounced, might surely be made clear.

The theory was completely satisfactory; to put it into practice demanded considerable delicacy. It involved, to begin with, the task of informing Edie that he no longer loved her; and that, though Edie didn't want him to do so, must be somewhat wounding to her pride. Again, the convention of his perpetual and hopeless adoration had been fixed and accepted for so many years that it was doubtful if Edie, and much less Harold, would believe him. They would consider this announcement another move in that game of heroic renunciation in which he was already so expert. And even if Edie ended by believing him, would Rachel follow suit? Her present attitude was anything but encouraging; he knew

that she was proud. Could she, any more than Edie, receive this *volte-face* without suspicion? Would she be content—she, in her self-sufficient pride—to accept, with humility, a lover at second-hand?

Edie, on the whole, presented the easier problem of the two. During the first weeks of Harold's stay at Roehampton, Jonathan was searching for the courage and the opportunity to tell her.

No doubt the uneasiness of his mind must have shown itself in his behaviour. The weight of this secret, that somehow or other had to be confessed, told on him. It made him awkward in Edie's company, and thankful, on the least valid excuse, to escape from it. A sudden pressure of business, which took him away from her, absolved him from self-accusations of a deliberate heartlessness, but was enough to prevent Edie from seeing the change in him. As a refuge from her loneliness—for by this time the limited resources of Mrs. Dakers' companionship had been exhausted—Edie turned to Rachel, not only because she liked her and had been quick to realize her worth, but because she was actually the only other woman available. While Jonathan was away at work, she spent the greater part of her time in Rachel's company; and when he returned his position was further complicated by finding the two women almost invariably together, a combination which protected each of them from the possibility of receiving his confidence and made him feel a traitor to both.

One evening, after a day of slogging work, he came

home late. Edie was nowhere to be seen, but she, or Mrs. Dakers, or Ada's successor had left a kettle at the fireside and tea laid on the little dining-room table. In his present mood he was thankful to be alone. He made his tea, and settled down in his old place at the table, absorbed in the evening paper which lay, folded, awaiting him. Sitting thus, tired and luxuriating in the warm relaxation, he was disturbed by the opening of the door, and looked up, quickly, with an automatic smile, to welcome Edie.

"I wondered where you were," he said, and was about to explain why he hadn't waited for her, when he realized abruptly that the shadowy figure in the doorway was not hers but Rachel's.

"Rachel! I thought you were Edie," he cried, with a tone of unconscious relief in his voice. "I came in late to tea. Do come and talk to me."

She hesitated. "Where's Edie?" she said. "I promised to be here at six."

"I've no idea where she is," he told her. "It's ten past six already. She must have forgotten. Do come in and sit down for a moment. It seems like years since we've talked about anything but prescriptions."

He rose, in an eager fluster, to give her a chair. Reluctantly, as though there were something in his voice that warned her, she took it. She sat down, with the width of the table between them, her chin propped on her hands. Jonathan, embarrassed by her reluctance, began talking wildly, simply for the sake of talking and

to cover the awkwardness that had arisen between them. She listened in solemn silence; the firelight, flickering over her face already coloured by a faint anxiety, made her, at that moment, strangely beautiful, recalling. . . . He was puzzled. What did this look, this situation recall?

The answer to his question came in a flood of reminiscence. How could he ever have forgotten it? That night—so many years ago; the night when, tired and exultant, he had returned from the tracheotomy case which had precipitated the ultimate pitched battle with Craig! Then, as now, he had come back to the empty house to find a meal, prepared by a woman's hands, awaiting him. Then, as now, she had stolen in like a ghost to listen to his tale of what had happened. She had sat in that very chair, with the table between them; in that very attitude, her chin propped solemnly on her hands.

"Do you remember?" he said; and his voice warmed to the memory of those queer turbulent days, as he reminded her how, just as at this moment, they had sat there together. "You slipped down from bed. It must have been in the middle of the night. You were wearing a kimono covered with storks and irises. Your hair was done up in plaits. I can see you now. We were wildly excited, both of us. That great battle! How many years ago? Six? It feels like a century!" He laughed: "Then do you remember. . . ?" His voice dropped suddenly. They both remembered together. Swept onward, carelessly, by the flood of



reminiscence, he realized almost too late whither it was carrying him. The roar of a cataract thundered in his ears. How could they, either of them, forget it? That moment when her pride in him, her thankfulness, the sudden tensivity of their isolation had combined to overwhelm her in unreasonable tears; that moment when Jonathan, moved and bewildered, had taken her, for the first and last time, in his arms; that precious moment when she had realized that she loved him! In both of their brains, simultaneously, the situation, even more poignant in memory than in actuality, renewed itself. The sentence which his mind had begun to form hung dead on his lips. Drugged by this potion of memory they gazed at each other in silence; her eyes entreating pity; in his the flame of a confessed desire.

"Rachel. . . My God!" he whispered.

"Don't, Jonathan! You must be mad." She put her hands to her eyes.

They were so rapt, those two, in this stupendous, unwilling, revelation, that neither she nor he was aware that Edie, entering the room in advance of Mrs. Dakers, had shared their secret, had seen the fire in Jonathan's eyes, the gesture of fear that had made Rachel cover hers; had heard the two choked whispers which confessed so much. For a second she stood like a stone; then, at once recovering herself, shattered their silence with a quick-fire of brisk and cheerful commonplace:

"Oh, Rachel dear, I'm *so* sorry! Am I dreadfully late? Mrs. Dakers asked me to shop with her. Look

what we've discovered: the most marvellous apples for this time of year! Did Jonathan give you some tea? Oh, but how *like* him! You're quite unfit to entertain ladies, Jonathan dear!"

Slowly, beneath this rapid drift of words, Jonathan emerged from his stupor. He saw Edie bustle round to Rachel's side and kiss her. Rachel, magnificently composed, had answered Edie's question about the tea in her low, level voice; but, glancing at her in wonder and admiration, Jonathan saw that her face was pale as alabaster. If Edie had seen or heard, there was no sign of resulting emotion in her voice or features. There wouldn't be, in any case, he thought. That was the wonderful thing about Edie; the way, above all others, in which her breeding told.

"Rachel, come nearer the fire," she was saying. "My dear, your hands are like ice!"

"The wind has changed," Mrs. Dakers commented sepulchrally, pausing in the middle of arranging the newly-purchased fruit, with her hand momentarily lifted, like a stage-butler's, to give the full effect to her only line.

Jonathan heard them as from a distance. They were all of them, not only Mrs. Dakers, acting like people in a play, speaking their appointed lines; precise; unreal. And he himself was out of it, remote as a spectator in the back row of the gallery; hearing, yet unpossessed by the illusion that held them; unmoved by anything in the whole scene but Rachel's alabaster face. She

knelt before the fire; Edie, possessively, affectionately, was chafing her cold hands. She turned and smiled at him.

"Jonathan, you looked frightfully bored. Do try to be sociable! Rachel, if you only knew how dreadful he is!"

Sociable? What, in God's name, was he expected to say? The tinkle of the telephone-bell in the hall saved him. Escaping, he hurried to answer it. Above the buzz of the free line there came the gay chatter of Edie's voice out of the distance. He heard himself speaking:

"Arthur? Is that you? Yes, of course. *Whom* did you say? *Craig*? My dear chap, it's fantastic! Well, she certainly must have been frightened if she called you in! Really? Is it as bad as that? Of course, I'll come at once. I'll pick you up in the car on my way down."

He hung up the receiver and stood, for a moment, irresolute. At any other time in his life he would have been eager to tell them all this extraordinary piece of news. Nobody in the world would be able to appreciate its significance more than Rachel. Yet, when he came to face it, he found that he couldn't bring himself to re-enter that room. He put his head in at the door and called to Edie. She looked up brightly; Rachel, beside her remained with lowered face.

"An urgent message," he told her. "I'm going at once with Arthur to the hospital. Of course I'll be late for the surgery. Rachel will manage."

"All right," Edie answered. "Goodbye, Jonathan dear."

Her smile was so curiously bright that he felt certain now that she had neither seen nor heard. A relief, in one way. And yet, perhaps, in another. . . .

The old car started up quickly. How amazingly reliable those ancient Rover engines were! The shopping crowd made way for him as he went down the High Street. People saluted him and smiled. A friendly place, Wednesford, for all its sordidness! At the top of the hill, on the left, stood Higgins's Buildings. They didn't change. The same distorted chimneys, the same broken windows stuffed with rags, the same slatternly women, Ada among them, gossiping as ever on the sandstone steps! It was in Higgins's Buildings that, on the night whose emotions had just been reborn, his trembling hands had achieved the tracheotomy operation on Ada's baby. The baby had shot up into a lanky little girl, with nothing to show for that sharp tussle with death but a pucker of white scar-tissue on her olive-skinned throat. At the bottom of the hill the Foundry Buildings lay dark. George Higgins had died last December, gluttoned with War-profits, despicable to the end. To think that this gross man had shared Rachel's blood! Slowing for the bridge he crossed the degraded Stour. That gorge, in the darkness, still had power to enchant his imagination. Inviolable river-water, born in the coolness of Uffdown, trickled over the shallows; phantasmal birches whispered; trains of pack-

horses came clinking to the bridge. In the middle of the New Road he pulled up opposite the house that had once been Lucas's. Arthur Martock, with a black bag of instruments, joined him quickly. As they drove on, Arthur amplified the astonishing news he had spoken over the wires.

"Mrs. Craig rang me up about two hours ago," he told Jonathan. "I got the surprise of my life, though old Craig, you know, has always been fairly decent to me—to counteract the fact that you and I were friends, of course. She said that she'd telephoned without consulting him. He didn't look pleased to see me, I can tell you! He's not very clear how it happened. Apparently he slipped on an asphalt path at the golf-links. Came down on his knees, and drove a hob-nail or something into the right one. He thought it had gone into the pre-patellar bursa: nothing to worry about. They'd been fomenting it and so on. He wouldn't let anyone see it. Naturally, you know what he is—he wouldn't send for you or me. She tried to induce him to consult someone in North Bromwich; but he's always had a down on the North Bromwich surgeons. Then it got worse; high fever and that sort of thing. He must have been pretty difficult, as you can imagine. When the wretched woman could stand it no longer she took the law into her own hands and called me in. Craig treated me like dirt. I found it difficult to keep my temper. But, of course, I saw at once that it was serious. His knee-joint's infected. Simply has to be opened up, and

quickly. I have my doubts about saving the limb as it is. I think, on the whole, I'd rather give the anæsthetic and let you do the job, Jonathan. It's a damned funny situation anyway. He kicked like the devil at going into the hospital; but I think I put the fear of God into him finally. He's inclined to be delirious now and then, but realizes, more or less, that it's life or death. Well, well, you shall see for yourself. I've stuck him in the private ward, of course. Lucky it was empty!"

The private ward seemed as saturated with poignant memory as everything else that evening. It was thither, Jonathan remembered, that he had taken Ada's baby; from it he had passed straight to that other scene which, only an hour ago, he had lived over again. But the new matron was very different from the frosty Miss Jessell. A plump and capable woman, healthy and good-humoured, she never forgot—with more justification for not forgetting than Miss Jessell—that she was a nurse as well as a lady. It was clear, as they entered the ward, that Craig, in spite of his perilous condition, resented her business-like familiarity. In his day, he seemed to be remembering, even matrons had behaved themselves before him like soldiers on parade.

"Here's Dr. Dakers," she said with brisk tactlessness. "Now we'll soon be all right!"

The introduction was unfortunate, yet so comical that even Craig's ugly lips relaxed into a grim smile.

"Well, Dakers," he said, in a tired voice, "I must confess I never expected to meet you under these . . .

happy circumstances. However," he added, with a gleam of irony, "everybody seems to be agreed that I'm in good hands."

"I'm sorry to see you like this, Craig," Jonathan answered honestly. "Martock has asked me to confirm his opinion. That's what it comes to. May I have a look at you?"

"You can do what you like with me." Craig spoke wearily. "I'm at your mercy. Curious, isn't it?"

There was never any doubt as to the correctness of Martock's diagnosis nor as to the urgent need for surgery. A brief examination satisfied Jonathan that the knee-joint was infected. As he bent above the bed, his mind, already curiously excited by the events of the evening, was further stirred by two profound emotions: the first arising from this ironical situation's poetic justice—how grimly, he thought, old Hammond would have smiled at it!—the second from the change that, quite apart from this acute disorder, had overtaken the man who had been his enemy. The body which now lay subject to his decree, the life that rested in his hands, were neither the life nor the body that he had known. That strong, malignant organism, whose iron will and potent physique had impressed him, no longer existed. Instead of it, he saw a grey, worn man, thin-shanked, spare, shrunken, pitiful, on whose tissues time had already stamped the seal of physical decadence. Once more he was painfully reminded of old Hammond.

"Of course," he told Craig at last, "you realize that there's only one thing to be done?"

Craig realized. At least there was no fear in his steely eyes.

"Martock would prefer me to do this job for you."

"Why not? I'm in your hands." Craig closed his eyes.

Of course, Jonathan reflected, he couldn't very well have refused. Yet, as he performed his antiseptic toilet in the theatre and put on his sterile overall, he couldn't help feeling impressed by Craig's submission. Its completeness was in keeping with the aristocracy of the man. This willingness to surrender life into the hands of another was one of the characteristics of higher human types. More: when that other man was, like himself, a bitter and persistent opponent, the surrender implied a compliment, and the highest imaginable, to medical integrity. But when, a few minutes later, the anæsthetized body was wheeled into the theatre, Craig ceased to be friend or enemy, to be a person at all. From that moment he no longer existed even as a patient. What Jonathan saw, what had become the subject of his skill, was nothing but an infected knee-joint resembling other knees on which he had operated. Absorbed in the technique of his operation, he thought of nothing else.

The business was soon over. The table, in charge of Martock, had gone back to the ward. In the steam of the theatre Jonathan stood while the sister unbuttoned his unstained overall from behind. The matron who had



assisted him went on chattering cheerfully. She hoped they'd not been too late. She always hated knee-joints. She talked, with a gay familiarity, of *Streptococci*, of autogenous vaccines. Suddenly she called Jonathan's attention, holding up one of the rubber gloves that he had discarded.

"Look, Dr. Dakers! You really are the limit! Do you know this is the third pair of gloves you've ruined in a month? And you always *will* use the most expensive kind. It's dreadful!"

Jonathan looked round and smiled.

"I'm sorry, matron," he said. "Most humble apologies! I must have caught the point of the scalpel in it."

"Oh well, as long as you're sorry," she laughed, "I suppose I can't scold you."

Martock returned. "It's all right," he told Jonathan. "He's coming round like an angel, and his pulse is quite good."

"Better think of a vaccine. Ten to one on a *streptococcus*. I suppose you'll stay with him a bit?"

"I shall have to see Mrs. Craig as well."

"Of course. Then, if you don't mind, I'll be pushing off. Let me know how he is to-morrow, won't you?"

During the time that he had spent at the Hospital the moon had risen. As he closed the door behind him Jonathan stepped out into a world transfigured, in which even the mean brick houses of the New Road seemed beautiful, their chimney-pots coldly shadowed on the roofs of damp slate as on ice. After the heated atmos-

phere of the theatre, choked with ether, the air of Wednesford seemed cool and sweet. He drew it, with a happy relief, into his lungs. Untainted by the acrid odours of the Black Country, it seemed to come straight into his nostrils from the high sky where stars, dimmed by moonlight, twinkled out of deep crevasses between heaped heads of snowy, slow-moving cloud. Gathered in a more than Alpine majesty, these cloud-banks, towered above the broken skyline where the fantastic bulk of Higgins's Buildings romantically detached itself from the other roofs of Wednesford, cresting the gorge of the Stour. As Jonathan dipped to the river-bed that panoply of gleaming vapour rose even more splendidly above his pit of shadow. Its vastness, its amplitude of freedom, seemed consonant with his exalted mood. Craig's physical abasement made him conscious and glad of his own youth and strength.

All the way back to the surgery he was thinking of Rachel, burning to tell her, the only person in the world who could fully appreciate it, the extraordinary turn of circumstances that had delivered Craig—so mercifully, as Providence decreed it—into his hands. He quickened the car's pace. Though the surgery-hour was over he expected that some few patients would still be waiting to see him. Rachel, as usual, would be "holding the fort" as they called it, till he returned. How she would thrill and glow to hear his story! If only, if only poor old Hammond had still been alive!

He garaged the car, and hurried along the brick

passage to the surgery door. Disappointment awaited him. It was locked, the window unlighted. She had sent the patients away and gone home herself: a blessing, in one way—at the moment he was unfit to deal with ordinary matters. Probably it was later than he imagined; the evening's excitement had made him unaware of the passage of time.

Retracing his steps to the street he entered the house through the front door. As he did so the cuckoo-clock which Mrs. Dakers had brought from Chadshill, began to announce the hour: ten wheezy cuckoos in a little whirr of clockwork. That meant that Mrs. Dakers would have gone to bed; he would have to be content with Edie for an audience; perhaps, perhaps Rachel was still keeping her company!

The dining-room was in darkness, but a light showed through the chink of the study-door. Edie, no doubt, would be there. He called, as he entered.

"Edie! I'm awfully late. You didn't wait supper for me?"

Silence received him. The room was empty. An unusual quietude possessed the little house. Turning, he went upstairs and knocked at Edie's door. No answer. Surely she couldn't be asleep already? He opened the door slightly. The room felt cold and empty.

Bewildered, he made his way downstairs again. It struck him that perhaps she had been tempted by the moonlight to see Rachel home. In that case he would

follow them—she would probably expect him to do so; in that case also, he would be able to tell Rachel his story after all.

A sudden sensation of hunger reminded him that they had probably left his supper in the dining-room. He struck a match to light the gas and see. Yes, there on the table, his place had been laid by Edie's careful hands. Dear child, one would never have imagined her so adaptable in these domestic ways! On the plate he saw a note addressed to himself in her handwriting. That, no doubt, would explain where she had gone. He tore open the envelope—how typical of her extravagance that was!—and read:

*My darling Jonathan,*

*This evening when I came in I realized what I've been a fool not to realize before. Please give me credit for foolishness and nothing else. You know that I'm too fond of you (to say nothing of being grateful) ever to have consciously stood in the way of your happiness. By the time you read this—if I manage to catch the beastly train—I shall be on my way to North Bromwich. Then I shall go on to Harold in London to-morrow. I'm doing this on my own responsibility, but I know that Hal will agree with me. Oh, Jonathan dear, I want you to forgive me—not for going away from you, but for having been so stupid as to imagine that I was doing right in staying with you. I want you to marry Rachel as soon*

*as Harold and I can make it possible for you. Try to forget—it won't be so difficult—that there ever was such a person as*

*Your devoted*

EDIE.

Half an hour later, still holding Edie's letter in his hand, as though it were a talisman conferring good fortune from which he dared not be parted, Jonathan walked upstairs in the dark. In that short intervening period his mind had compassed the emotions of a lifetime. First, wonder. The suddenness of Edie's decision, though typical of her swift nature, took his breath away. His own processes of thought and action were so deliberate, his respect for the conventions so deeply rooted, that he couldn't imagine anyone else defying them so precipitately. It took him some moments to realize that Edie not only proposed to leave him but had actually gone. Next came concern for Edie—Edie, poor child, whom he had always regarded, however unreasonably, as a creature of the utmost delicacy, needing his protection. He was so used to thinking of her in this protective way that he couldn't bear to imagine her setting out alone at that hour of the night on such a desperate journey. He felt, illogically, but with perfect honesty, that, even when she was running away from him, he ought to have accompanied her and made her flight as easy as possible. Even if she didn't want him he still had a duty to her. He wondered what train she

had caught, and even for a moment contemplated taking out the car and overtaking her in North Bromwich, until the ridiculousness of this idea struck his bewildered mind. Then, quickly following, came a quick flood of admiration, of gratitude for the generosity of the sacrifice which she was making. Some weeks ago, for her sake and Harold's, he had himself proposed a divorce; but, in his scheme, it was himself, not she and Harold, who was to have borne the blame and the discredit of the proceedings. She had no right to sacrifice her reputation in this way; if only for his sake, for him, to whom her name was so dear, she might surely have submitted to the plan of collusion which he had proposed to both of them.

Once more he was seized by the desire to overtake her and reason with her. But that, as he knew, was the last thing that she wanted. It was precisely to avoid it that she had launched herself on this precipitate flight. The whole proceeding was in keeping with her nature, so reckless, so opposite to his. She had packed her bag that night with the same impulsiveness as that with which she had flown from Stourford to meet Harold in North Bromwich a year before. Her movements were too swift, too impetuous for him to keep pace with her. Never in his life had he kept pace with her. Never. Whenever he had seemed to hold her in his grasp she was escaping from him.

Then, gradually, above the anxiety, he became aware of an emotion whose rising power overshadowed all

these others: the sense of a loosening of intolerable strains, of an intense relief. This feeling was so foreign to his experience that he could scarcely adjust himself to meet it. His freedom disorientated him. For more than twelve years—ever since that moonlight night when first he had set eyes on Edie at Silver Street—no single thought or action that his brain had generated had not been governed, consciously or unconsciously, by the fact of her existence. For twelve whole years he had been a prisoner; rejoicing, at first, in his servitude; later, when its conditions demanded unimaginable sacrifices, accepting them as his natural lot in life. Now, when the shackles of that servitude had suddenly been struck from his limbs, he could not move, he had lost the power of movement. Like a bird bred in captivity his soul, released, returned bewildered to the cage door. The wings of his imagination had been clipped; he could not fly. His thoughts, when they took the air, continued to circle back pitifully to Edie's feet. For the moment he could think of nothing but her happiness. That Edie, at least, should be happy was the hope that emerged again and again, from these ruins of a world.

Still moving like a man in a dream rather than one who had just been awakened, he undressed and went to bed, and soon, from sheer emotional and physical exhaustion, fell asleep.

In the middle of the night he woke suddenly. His mind was no longer bewildered. From the instant of

the gorged lymphatics showed themselves in a fiery serpentine track.

He determined to go downstairs to the surgery and boil water for a fomentation. He wondered if it would be worth while trying to open up the finger in the neighbourhood of the minute wound, which now showed itself with gaping, shiny edges. It would be better, he decided, to do nothing of the kind. If it had been someone else's finger he wouldn't have hesitated; but when it came to dealing with themselves doctors were singularly helpless. Arthur would have to look at the wretched thing in the morning. Of course it was hardly worth troubling him, but then, one never knew.

Boiling the water for the fomentation in a sterilizer, it struck him that the surgery was unusually cold. In the ordinary way, being backed by the kitchen stove, it was the warmest room in the house. A little wave of gooseflesh flickered down in his spine, like a catspaw on smooth water.

It was the first gust of a squall. A moment later his body was shaken violently, his teeth began to chatter in the grip of a sharp shivering fit.

"It must really be cold," he thought. "That can't be a rigor." He hurried on with his fomentation and went upstairs again. The surface of the steps seemed unfamiliar; he was walking on air; his head swam, so that he was forced to clutch at the banisters for support. He felt sick. He was actually thankful when he reached his bed in safety.



That shivering fit, he decided, must have been nothing after all. This room wasn't cold. Indeed, the bed seemed warmer than usual—so warm, to tell the truth, as to be actually uncomfortable. He threw back the coverlet, and, doing so, realized that his left arm was stiff to the shoulder.

His head ached. That, of course, was the effect of the quinine, which accounted also, naturally, for his nausea and giddiness on the stairs. His own cunning impressed him. You could explain everything of that kind, being a doctor, if only he took the trouble. But would quinine, even a big dose of it, take effect so quickly? Why not, if it were taken on an empty stomach? His mind was working now, in spite of this cursed headache, at a terrific rate. The thoughts ran ahead of each other. They vanished, like puffs of smoke, before he could catch them and put them into words. Like puffs of smoke, blown away on the wind.

That day on Uffdown. . . . That was a wind, if you like! How Edie and he had been obliged to stagger against it! You could lean on the wind that day. Thoughts, words, puffs of smoke. Smoke-writing, like that which the aeroplanes made over the sky. The smoke-words warped and sagged and dissolved and trailed away. It was the devil when words, when thoughts, that ought to behave themselves and stay fixed where you could see them, behaved like that! This was how thoughts behaved when you were just falling asleep.

But he wasn't falling asleep. The pain wouldn't let him. Whenever his consciousness began to waver the damned thing stabbed at him. And it was so hot, now. An absolute tropical heat. As hot as if the blessed house were on fire. No, it wasn't the house that was on fire. "My mistake. I beg your pardon," he said. What was on fire was his arm, his mind, his whole body. Shadrach Meshach and To-bed-we-go. They came out living from the burning fiery furnace, and the smell of fire had not passed from them. Or *had* it passed from them? That thought had gone west like the others! How could anyone be expected to think, with a head on fire? Nobody, no doctors particularly, had the sense to make allowances. It was a damned shame. The only person in the world who really made allowances was Rachel. When Rachel and I are married, he thought, she'll always make allowances.

*When we are married, how happy we'll be!* Extraordinary how those old songs stuck in one's head! Where did it come from? The Messenger Boy? Florodora? Yes, Florodora. Leslie Stuart. Chirgwin, the white eyed Kaffir, used to sing his songs. And someone else—Eugene Stratton. At the Prince's Theatre in North Bromwich. Those student days. Good Lord, what a funny business! That pantomime girl—he forgot her name! Queer that you could live with a girl for a week and forget her name! Edie? Well, she was just like Edie anyway.

This heat. Terrific. If one could plunge one's

whole body in water and drink as one swam. Severn water. Close to the reeds, above the ferry at Arley. Sabrina fair, listen where thou art sitting, under the glassy green translucent wave, in twisted braids of lilies knitting the loose train of thy amber-dropping hair . . . Amber-dropping, God, what a phrase! Like Edie's, pale amber. Like the girl in the pantomime. Not a bit like Rachel. Dear Rachel, with her firm cool hands! If only he could feel them on his forehead now! *Lew-cothea's lovely hands.* . . .

God, this heat! What could you expect in summer? *The buzzing of innumerable bees.* Nothing of the sort. Be sensible. Quinine! One of the war poets—that chap who had served with Arthur in East Africa—had written—*Marching on Somewhere-or-other—about that. Thin wings of fever whining in my ear.* Damned fool! It wasn't fever at all. Just quinine. He, Jonathan, hadn't any fever anyway.

How hopelessly foolish! Here was he, a doctor—and not such a dusty doctor, by your leave!—who hadn't even had the sense to take his own temperature. Anyone with the guts of a louse—that was Arthur's phrase—would have done so long ago. The thermometer-case was in his waistcoat pocket; the waistcoat laid, with his coat, over the back of that chair. He could find it easily in the dark: three steps from the bed. One, two three. . . . Splendid! There it was. Hadn't he said so? He was beginning to argue with emptiness like a drunken man. It occurred to him that he hadn't been drunk for

years; never since that day when his father had been smashed up. He could do at that moment with a long, cool whisky and soda.

Now, as to this temperature. A light to read it by. With enormous effort he managed to pull the by-pass chain, then sank, with a groan of relief down into the hot bed again. He put the thermometer under his tongue. Immediately his teeth began to chatter. "Keep still, you fool!" he growled at himself. "Just a minute!"

Painfully concentrating he contrived to read the thermometer's swimming figures.

One hundred and three point four.

"Good Lord!" he thought, "Good Lord!"

It was curious that the reading affected him with surprise rather than concern.

. . . . .

When Arthur Martock arrived in answer to Mrs. Dakers' summons next morning, the nightmare that had ridden through Jonathan's brain in the darkness had vanished. His mind was weak and hazy, but relatively calm, sufficiently calm to realize that Arthur, dear fellow, was trying to put a good face on a situation that alarmed him.

"We doctors are all the same!" Jonathan thought. "It does no good anyway. When people are really ill it makes no difference whether a doctor admits that they are or pretends that they aren't."

He supposed that he must be really ill. Otherwise

Arthur wouldn't surely have taken the trouble to get in these two nurses. Of course he realized how utterly useless Mrs. Dakers would be, though really it didn't matter one way or the other.

It took more effort than it was worth to listen to all the reassuring things that Arthur was saying. Something about Edie? No, no, he didn't want Edie. He wanted Rachel; he'd told them that already—Rachel, so quiet, with her cool hands. And there was one thing—something awfully important that he wanted to ask. What was it? If only it didn't hurt so much to think! Ah, yes. At last. Craig. . . .

"Doing splendidly," Arthur told him. "Temperature coming down. Couldn't be better."

A thought so whimsical that it had to be expressed somehow: "Arthur," he was whispering.

"Yes?"

"I say. . . . Old Craig's got his own back on me all right!"

He was laughing to himself. When once you started to laugh, inwardly, like that, it was difficult to stop.

. . . . .

Gradually, it seemed to him, people were represented more and more by words or voices. Sometimes the voices took momentary shape and their owners appeared, then faded away again, as if they were being seen through windows in a moving veil of cloud; a white, soft, billowy cloud, not at all unpleasant. Among such

momentary revelations he saw Mrs. Dakers, grotesquely posed in a number of tragic attitudes. He tried to smile at her; but as soon as he smiled that window closed and she was lost. Just in the same annoying way he lost Lloyd Moore, who appeared for a moment at Arthur Martock's side and bent his spare chest over him.

It was an awful pity that Lloyd Moore should vanish like that, because the sight of him reminded Jonathan that he had borrowed money from him, years and years ago, to pay for the purchase of old Hammond's practice. He couldn't be sure that he'd ever paid back a penny of it, the whole thing had slipped his memory. If Lloyd Moore had waited another moment he could have asked him and satisfied his conscience; while now, in all probability, he would never be able to find out.

Sometimes the words that came without people, blazing suddenly out of the darkness like those on a sky-sign, irritated Jonathan. Words like "virulent" and "septicaemia" and "streptococcus" and "polyvalent" and "typhoid state." He knew they had given him serum because the needle hurt. His principal desire, just now, was to be left alone. Alone with Rachel, that is. He couldn't spare her. Now that he had got her finally he didn't mean to lose her. For the most part what he liked best was to lie still, with his hand quite definitely in hers. That made a sort of sheet-anchor, attaching him to reality in spite of all the strange adventures through which his mind went drifting like a detached balloon. All through them he had—not

exactly the consciousness, rather a submerged confidence that she was there; that she wouldn't allow his balloon to drift out of sight.

Those day-dreams—or were they day-dreams?—in the present confusion days and nights seemed much the same—brought him into contact with lots of things that he had forgotten. Old Hammond often stumped through them, with his wolfish smile; a grizzled warrior, indomitable as ever. And there, on the top of Uffdown, where the wind blew a hurricane making the fir-trees roar, came his own father, striding along in his homespun knickerbockers, carrying his old dispatch-case. But the lettering on the despatch case was no longer E.D. It was MIHI ET MUSIS: and Jonathan smiled for he knew that there was a lot more “mihi” in it than “musis”—to be precise, a bottle of whisky from the grocer's.

Then there were women; many, many women. They were all different, and they were all the same. There was one who spoke French to him, talking about Brittany and about the Pardon at Loc Ildut on Corpus Christi. She was gentle, and white, and childlike. He knew her perfectly well, and yet he couldn't place her; till all of a sudden the mystery vanished and he knew that she was Edie. All those pale women who worried him at first ended by becoming Edie, and always the revelation took him by surprise.

They watched him, Arthur and Rachel, and, in bursts of spectacular but tragic incompetence, Mrs. Dakers, for four days and nights. To them, in spite of the vivid confusion of consciousness in which he was living, Jonathan appeared unconscious. Lloyd Moore, who came from North Bromwich on the second day, was by no means cheerful. The rapidity with which the symptoms had developed, he told them was sinister. They were dealing with an extremely virulent type of blood infection: a true septicaemia, an invasion of the blood-stream not only by the toxins but by the actual micro-organisms of disease. The *coccus* had been identified; so far, so good. It was, as Jonathan, with a feeble appreciation of the matter's irony, had suggested, Craig's last bequest to his victorious opponent, a Parthian arrow; but whereas, in Craig, the organism had been isolated locally and the patient was recovering, in Jonathan the infection had become as diffused as the blood-stream itself, and Jonathan, in spite of all that science could do for him, would probably die. In a condition so general, surgery, at least, was bankrupt. It resolved itself, finally, into a contest between the infection and the anti-bodies that Jonathan's unconscious defences could produce.

If Mrs. Dakers would only be patient. . . . The great man laid his hand on Rachel's shoulder.

"I'm not Mrs. Dakers," she told him.

"Really? I beg your pardon. I made sure you were his wife. Who are you?"



"My name is Hammond. You knew my father."

"John Hammond . . . to think of it! Yes, I can see a likeness."

Those keen eyes saw more than a likeness when Lloyd Moore gazed at her pale face. "Cheer up, my dear," he said.

In the meantime, this low, muttering delirium that agitated Jonathan's brain and moved his lips without ceasing, producing in those who nursed him an exhaustion only less than his own, was the most disquieting feature of all.

In the middle of the fourth night the muttering ceased suddenly. Rachel, who had come on duty at four o'clock, relieving one of the nurses from North Bromwich, was amazed to find him so quiet. For an hour or more he lay still, his lips silent, his breathing so gentle that it was hard to believe that he was still alive.

In this strange stillness, Rachel was aware that one of the hands which lay on the coverlet had stirred. She took it quickly in hers; for that, since the first day of his illness, seemed to be what he wanted most. She had only not touched it before because he seemed so tranquil. Turning to look at him lovingly, she saw that his eyes were wide open. Apparently they did not see her, but they saw something, and, whether he could see her or no, he guessed that she was there.

"Rachel. . . What is that light?" he said.

There was no light, she thought; yet, when she looked in the direction where his eyes were turned, she

saw a transverse band of ashen grey that showed beneath the lowered blind.

"It's the dawn, Jonathan darling," she whispered, her face close to his.

"The dawn? What dawn?" he answered bewilderingly. She could not imagine what he meant. He closed his eyes.

Half an hour later his lips opened again.

"Rachel. . . ."

"Yes, Jonathan?"

"I love you."

"My darling one!"

After that he was silent. There was no sound in the room, in all the house, until, at five exactly, the great steam siren in Hingston's Steelworks at Wolverbury blew out its mournful minor third over the sleeping lands. The tragic triad quivered in the morning mists, then died away. Rachel sat on, motionless as a statue that keeps stony watch in desert places. Her marble face grew whiter, not warmer, in the increasing light. At six o'clock Arthur Martock entered the room on tip-toe. She did not move. He approached her, with a look of interrogation.

"He's asleep," she whispered.

Martock bent over the bed and Jonathan's prostrate figure. He listened intently, then rose and shook his head.

THE END

*Anacapri*, 18:1:28.







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